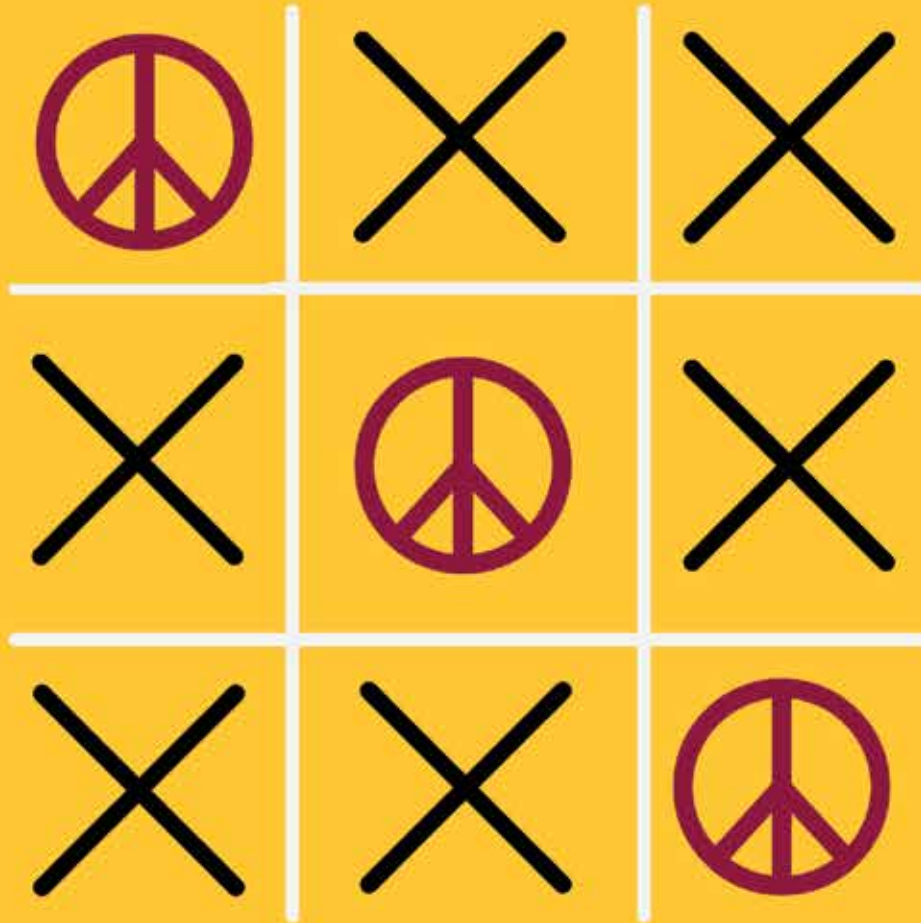


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Faith in Action for Social Justice



## Game Changer?

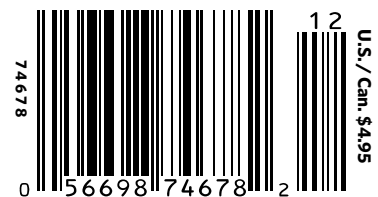
The Catholic Church, with its 1.2 billion members, takes a new look at the theology of war and peace.

### PLUS:

The women who inspired Mary • Stepping away from private prisons

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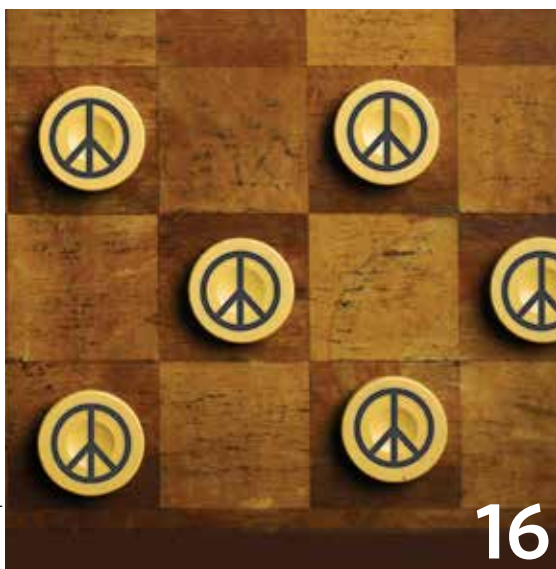
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**GLOBAL MINISTRIES**  
The United Methodist Church





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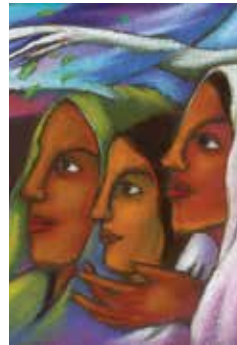


**ONE OF OUR** favorite correctives to the peppermint-scented, tinsel-wrapped whirl of holiday consumerism is the Song of Mary (Luke 1:46-55)—a testimony to God doing what God does best: lifting up the lowly, bringing down the rich, and generally confounding everyone's expectations about power and holiness. It's pretty radical stuff, all the more so when you consider it's voiced through a young Jewish woman. Where did Mary learn to pray like that?

Perhaps from the intertestamental writings known as the Apocrypha, says Reta Halteman Finger in "Mary's Role Models." Though Mary surely knew about A-list heroes in the Hebrew Bible such as Miriam and Esther, Finger notes that first-century Jews such as Mary would also have

been acquainted with lesser-known figures such as Judith and Susanna, women who used their own faithfulness to God to undermine the patriarchal systems they lived in.

ANOTHER PASSAGE you're likely to hear during Advent is Isaiah 9, the prophecy so famously trumpeted in Handel's *Messiah*: "And his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace." In an era of global conflict, what does it mean to be followers of the Prince of Peace? As senior associate editor Rose Marie Berger writes in "Game Changer?" it's a question facing



a growing number of Catholics. These Catholics, especially those from regions of the world where there is active conflict, are convinced that just war doctrine has outlived its usefulness and are now pressing the church to develop robust, practical teachings on gospel nonviolence. "We need a clear

message from the church—from the pope to the grassroots—that the church stands for nonviolence," says South Sudanese Bishop Paride Taban, a survivor of Africa's longest-running civil war. "We are the voice of the church, and we are coming here to say that this is the need of the church." And with Pope Francis at the helm, we're hopeful. ■

## Letters

### Gimme Shelter

I was glad to see "Convicted of the Gospel" by Darlene Nicgorski included in the September/October issue. The "ministry of sanctuary" that she mentioned is an important and timely way to show the world we are Christians through our love. I have been lobbying my members of Congress and letting them know why my faith motivates my advocacy. The faith voice is crucial to immigration reform's success and is necessary if we want any reforms to reflect our beliefs in human dignity, equality, and justice. I hope that the church around the country will join in the sanctuary movement, whether it is through advocacy, charity, or sheltering those who face the immediate threat of deportation.

**Thomas Cassidy**  
Norman, Oklahoma

### Base Values

You cannot reform the police state or our culture of incarceration ("Black and Blue," by Ryan Hammill, September/October 2016) without a critique of our country's values that proliferate fear and aggression. It's how we were built and how we've sustained our way of life. Until then, taxpayers need to demand transparency from law

## Few realize the danger we face; nuclear war cannot be allowed to happen.

enforcement, stop the flow of tax dollars to militarize them, and advocate for laws to protect citizens—especially citizens of color.

**Tamara Cedre**  
via Facebook

### Prophets On the Loose

I read about the Tennessee weapons plant protest ("An 82-Year-Old Nun Did What?" by Rosalie Riegle, September/October 2016) in the news when it happened. I appreciate the update. I did not know that the "prophets of Oak Ridge" were released. Few realize the danger we all face; nuclear war cannot be allowed to happen. Pray for peace and the destruction of these weapons.

**Jim Halliday**  
Lafayette, Georgia

### Think About Hawaii

I was just reading your article "The Categories That Divide Humanity" (by Jim Wallis, July 2016) and couldn't help but think about Hawaii. As he said, "in just a few decades, America will no longer be a white-majority nation; we will instead be

a majority of minorities." What's interesting is that Hawaii is already that: There isn't a majority race or ethnicity in Hawaii. All groups fall under 50 percent of the population. It would be interesting to research this state and see how citizens coexist or struggle to coexist. What kinds of ramifications are there to living in such a culture, as the continental U.S. is slowly becoming this same kind of melting pot?

**Mark Wilson**  
Evansville, Indiana

### The Target of Atonement

The greatest need we have is to recover a love for one another—not animals ("How Evangelicals Can Recover Their Love of Animals," by Karen Swallow Prior, July 2016)! Christ did not come to die for animals; he came to die for sinful, lost human beings.

**Gareth Evans**  
via Facebook

**Your turn.** Write to [letters@sojo.net](mailto:letters@sojo.net) or Letters, Sojourners, 408 C Street NE, Washington, DC 20002. Include your name, city, and state. Letters may be edited.

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BY JIM WALLIS

## Ministers of Reconciliation



**OUR NATION** needs to begin healing the deep wounds that this election cycle has caused and exacerbated.

What wounds are these? Deep down, our country has developed a very large empathy deficit. The unprecedented toxicity of the rhetoric that came from Donald Trump emboldened many of his supporters to become vile and even violent in their characterizations of Hillary Clinton, her supporters, and anyone who didn't agree with them.

The anonymity of the internet and the nature of social media helped fuel the rise of the alt-right, a catch-all term for extremists that encompasses white nationalists, Neo-Nazis, and virulent misogynists, many of whom were Trump supporters. The CEO of his campaign, Steve Bannon, was one of the alt-right's most prominent boost-

responded by demonizing not just Trump but everyone who supported his candidacy, and often in similarly toxic language. In some ways, liberals made a major mistake in the way they caricatured conservatives and previous Republican nominees. Speaking in apocalyptic terms about decent people such as Mitt Romney, whose positions they strongly disagree with, has made it more difficult to break through to both the media and rank-and-file conservatives about the clear and present danger of Trump's candidacy. And while Clinton's famous "basket of deplorables" comment was taken out of context to feed a perception that she had no empathy for any of Trump's supporters, many people on the left make precisely this mistake. They view all of Trump's supporters as ignorant racists and dismiss the real economic and social forces that have left many working-

class whites behind, alienated and angry.

These threads aren't mutually exclusive. Some Trump

supporters were, in fact, racist, xenophobic, and misogynistic, at least in part as a result of their upbringing and socioeconomic circumstances. That doesn't mean we can write these people off as "irredeemable." That would be an especially problematic thing for Christians, of all people, to believe about fellow human beings.

And it certainly does not entitle us to belittle the image of God in them, or to deny their basic humanity—even if we have seen them do exactly that to people whom we love and want to protect. Jesus commanded us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. How can we demonstrate that love even toward Donald Trump's most toxic followers?

I believe it starts with empathy, which can only be accomplished

through the forging of authentic relationships between people of different races, classes, genders, sexual orientations, and political views. After all, research suggests that changes in societal attitudes about LGBTQ rights, for example, are driven in large part by people learning that their child, another relative, or friend—someone they love—is LGBTQ.

Churches and other communities of faith have a key role to play in providing safe spaces for bringing together people who come from very different backgrounds or belief systems. Churches that are not already racially, socially, economically, or politically diverse should endeavor to become more diverse and work to establish practices and programs that would regularly bring people together with communities that are very different from their own.

When we are in real relationship with people who are on the surface different from us, it gives us the opportunity to hear and believe each other's stories. When that happens, genuine empathy often follows. New conversations and relationships must lead to changing the policies and structures that oppress communities of color and the marginalized working-class whites who have become so angry.

We are told in scripture (2 Corinthians 5) that God has appointed us as "ambassadors" of Christ's mission of reconciliation. If we take that ministry seriously, we can begin to heal the wounds of our terribly polarized society and follow the Reign of God a little closer in our world. Let's remember the part of the Lord's Prayer many of us recite each week in church: "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." ■

*Jim Wallis is editor-in-chief of Sojourners magazine.*

### How can we demonstrate love even toward Donald Trump's most toxic followers?

ers. These supporters embraced Donald Trump with cult-like fanaticism and used their online anonymity to hurl violent invective, peddle conspiracy theories, and even make death threats to people who opposed Trump or who were perceived as being biased against him. (Mainstream journalists, especially those who are black, Latino/a, Muslim, or Jewish, were the most frequent targets.) There was a complete lack of empathy from the alt-right for the feelings and motivations of anyone who did not support Trump or who belonged to one of the many groups he insulted.

Trump's campaign lifted a rock in American life, and all sorts of ugly things crawled out from beneath that rock. They denied the image of God in the people they targeted.

Many left-leaning partisans

By Matthew Soerens

## No Room in the Inn for Refugees?

Only 8 percent of U.S. churches are helping refugees.

**LAST DECEMBER**, my daughter, Zipporah—who has taken to acting out the Christmas story using our wooden nativity set—observed that our crèche was missing a “mean king” figurine. That got me to thinking: I have never seen a nativity set with a King Herod figure.

We tend to close the curtains and go home for a family dinner right after the Magi bow before Jesus with their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

But after the Magi head home, Joseph is warned in a dream to escape Herod’s genocidal tyranny by fleeing to Egypt with his wife and child.

We don’t know how the Holy Family was treated when they reached that foreign country. Were they welcomed or feared? Did Egyptians help this vulnerable family to resettle or did local carpenters fret that Joseph might steal their jobs? Was Jesus befriended by other children or viewed as a potential disease-carrier?

Compassion for the world’s estimated

21.3 million refugees—individuals who have fled their countries because of a credible fear of persecution—competes with our own fear that the violence they flee might impact us. This polarized reaction shapes the response by the United States and others to the global refugee crisis.

Nine in 10 Protestant pastors in the United States say that, as Christians, we have

**I’ve never seen a nativity set with a King Herod figure.**

a biblical responsibility to care for refugees and other foreigners based on clear biblical injunctions, according to LifeWay Research. The same survey found that only 8 percent of local churches are helping refugees—nearly half acknowledged a sense of fear in their congregations regarding the arrival of refugees.

White evangelicals, by a margin of 2-to-1, were opposed to increasing the number of Syrian refugees admitted to the U.S.,

according to the Pew Research Center. (A majority of white mainline Protestants were also opposed and a slim majority of Catholics and black Protestants were in favor.) It’s ironic that followers of Jesus would be so afraid of refugees, given that we worship one!

Refugees are not terrorists. Most people do not have a working knowledge of the extremely thorough process each refu-

gee must complete before admittance to the United States. This screening process, which is coordinated between the U.S. Departments of State, Homeland Security, and Defense along with the National Counterterrorism Center and the FBI, usually takes at least 18 months once someone is referred to be considered for resettlement. It’s the most thorough scrutiny that any category of visitors or immigrants entering the U.S. is required to undergo.

Many years after Jesus’ flight to Egypt,

Jacinda Bullie



### #Pray4Bresha

Teens on a Chicago subway demonstrate on behalf of Bresha Meadows, a 15-year-old girl in Ohio accused of killing her father after surviving years of his abuse. If convicted, Meadows could face life in prison, but advocates, including people of faith, have pressed for her release. “It is a nightmare no child of God should have to endure,” wrote Sojourners’ Elaina Ramsey. “Bresha is a survivor in need of restoration, not incarceration.”



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The mission of *Sojourners* magazine is to inspire hope and action by articulating the biblical call to racial and social justice, life and peace, and environmental stewardship.

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my co-worker Durmomo Gary made a similar trip. Gary worked as a Bible translator in Sudan before being threatened with violence and fleeing north. For several years he and his family lived as refugees in Egypt until they were accepted by the U.S. State Department for resettlement in Chicago. World Relief—an evangelical organization that is among nine agencies authorized by the State Department to resettle refugees—assisted them, and they were welcomed by a local church. Gary has served as pastor of the Sudanese Community Church. He's completing his Master's degree at Moody Theological Seminary. And he's joined the staff of World Relief, helping other refugees.

The U.S. Refugee Resettlement Program has a proud history, but its future is politically precarious.

In November 2015, the House of Representatives voted with bipartisan support to block the resettlement of all refugees from Syria and Iraq. The Senate stopped this

action, but similar legislation could easily re-emerge. A separate bill last year sought to shut down refugee resettlement altogether.

While local churches—working in collaboration with World Relief, Church World Service, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, and others—stand ready to welcome refugees, we can do so only if there are policies in place to keep the country open to carefully vetted refugees.

After spending his early years as a refugee in Egypt, Jesus later exhorted his disciples to welcome others as we would welcome him. If we fail to extend this welcome out of fear or any other reason, we reject Jesus himself. We're saying there's no room in the inn. What role will we play in the Christmas story? ■

*Matthew Soerens is the U.S. director of church mobilization for World Relief. He is the co-author of Seeking Refuge: On the Shores of the Global Refugee Crisis.*

By Jenny Neme and Michael Joseph

## A Roller-Coaster Ride in Colombia

Churches, like the rest of the country, split over the peace accord.

**AFTER 52 YEARS** of war and four years of negotiations, a peace accord was signed in late September between the Colombian government and FARC rebels. Six days later, a national referendum failed to bring the accord into force.

Within a few days of the referendum, a massive popular movement took to the streets of Colombia's major cities to ensure that negotiations continued. Then, Colombian president Juan Manuel Santos, but not his FARC counterpart, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

These events have been a roller-coaster ride for Colombian churches, which have been working toward this accord for decades. Colombian Christians have played an important, if often behind-the-scenes, role in advancing peace in this country.

The Catholic Church helped facilitate the highly secret early dialogue between government and rebel leaders, paving the way for the current peace process. Mennonites have worked for more than 25 years for the right to conscientious objection in a country with

mandatory military service for all males. In a landmark decision, this year the Colombian military officially granted conscientious objector status to a potential recruit, Juan José Marín Gómez.

In 2015, FARC guerrillas called on "civil society and churches" to monitor their unilateral ceasefire. The Interchurch Dialogue for Peace in Colombia (DiPaz), which includes Protestants, Anabaptists, and Catholics, jumped at the opportunity. "We worked with other civil society organizations and contacted networks of churches all over Colombia, seeking information any time there were reports of a possible ceasefire violation," said Angélica Rincón, who coordinated the monitoring for DiPaz. "In one of our first surveys, we heard back from numerous pastors in conflict areas saying that this was the most peace they had ever experienced." The ceasefire held, and conflict-related violence dropped to the lowest levels in more than 50 years.

DiPaz and the Colombian Conference of Catholic Bishops were asked to facilitate

## From the Archives

Nov-Dec 2001

### The Silence of God

**[AFTER 9/11]** Many of us feel a deep desire for revenge and violent retribution. We know how natural that is. We want to strike back at the perpetrators. And it is true: We do need to find and punish them. But we must not let that need be overwhelmed by sheer rage. We need to counter those who want to bomb indiscriminately, to “take them out” with missiles, or even to use everything in our arsenal. ...

Can we together agree that retribution is not the way of Jesus? Can we remain steadfast in non-violence, despite the skepticism of those who embrace violence as a way of fighting violence? Can we repudiate belief in redemptive violence? Christians must behave as Christians no matter how much our society and churches ridicule nonviolence as idealistic and ineffective. If we cannot be faithful in such a crisis as we presently face, when will we?

Finally, we must cling to God by blind faith in such a time as this. To the question, Where is God in all this? we can answer, Where God always is: nearer than breathing and closer than hands or feet. But just as the clouds of dust and smoke and falling debris blotted out the sun on Sept. 11, so horror of this dimension blots out the light of God. In such a time, we cannot perhaps feel God’s presence, but it is there, and we have to cling to it even as we scream at the silence of God. ■

*Walter Wink was professor of biblical interpretation at Auburn Theological Seminary in New York City when this article appeared.*



ceremonies when the government or FARC asked forgiveness for atrocities committed during the war. For example, in December 2015 the Colombian government returned bodies of 29 “disappeared” persons to their families. A Pentecostal pastor, two Mennonite lay leaders, and a Catholic priest presided over the ceremony.

Then came the October referendum. President Santos asked Colombians to vote the 297-page peace accord up or down, a strategy aimed to give Santos political support to implement the accord. When the final tally came in, 50.2 percent voted against and 49.8 percent voted in support. Colombians, including the Christian community, were split down the middle. Many Protestant and Anabaptist churches spoke in favor of the accord, while Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal churches voiced opposition.

The opposition felt the accord was too lenient with FARC rebels. The war had left at least 220,000 dead and nearly 5 million displaced. Some felt that FARC was gaining too much political power in Congress; others that the demobilization payouts

were too generous.

One curious aspect seemed to define the religious opposition: the perception that the peace accord contained a hidden “gender ideology,” promoting an LGBTQ agenda that would destroy the traditional family.

“My compatriots march in defense of family values,” declared Álvaro Uribe, the conservative former president who rallied religious voters against the peace deal of Santos, his political rival. If this had not been used as a wedge issue, the peace accord likely would have passed in the plebiscite.

Both the FARC leadership and President Santos have pledged to maintain the bilateral ceasefire and continue to work for securing the peace. Colombian churches will continue to be steadfast and resolute in their faith commitment to peace with justice for all. ■

*Jenny Neme is director of JustaPaz, the Mennonite Christian Center for Justice, Peace, and Nonviolent Action in Bogotá, Colombia.*

*Michael Joseph is a missionary serving with JustaPaz and coordinator of the peace studies center of the Baptist University and Seminary in Cali, Colombia.*

By John Dorhauer

## Ending the Scourge of For-Profit Prisons

**The Department of Justice ended contracts with private prison corporations. It's time for Immigration to do the same.**

**BETWEEN 1980** and 2013, the federal prison population increased by 800 percent, according to the Department of Justice, at a far-faster rate than the Bureau of Prisons could handle. By 2013, approximately 15 percent of BOP’s prisoners were housed in for-profit prisons.

In August, the Department of Justice (DOJ) announced that it will no longer contract with private prisons for housing federal prisoners. “[Private prisons] simply do not provide the same level of correctional service, programs, and resources,” said Deputy Attorney General Sally Yates. “They do not save substantially on costs; and as noted in a recent report by the Department’s Office of Inspector General, they do not maintain the same level of safety and security.”

Within weeks, Secretary of Homeland Security Jeh Johnson responded to DOJ by directing his teams “to evaluate whether the

immigration detention operations conducted by Immigration and Customs Enforcement [ICE] should move in the same direction”—to evaluate whether ICE should eliminate contracts with for-profit immigration detention companies. There is no need for a review. Multiple reports, from human rights organizations and the Department of Justice itself, give damning evidence against the inhumane practices of for-profit prisons and detention centers.

As the leader of a Christian denomination, I feel a deep obligation to pay attention to foundational passages from our sacred texts in the midst of the current challenges we face as a country. When it comes to prisoners and immigrants, two passages are bedrock for me. Leviticus 19:34 reminds us to love foreigners as we love ourselves. In Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus prioritizes the vulnerable. He



issues a clear call for those who follow him to care for the stranger, the prisoner, the naked, the hungry, and the thirsty.

Incarceration in for-profit detention prisons is one of the cruelest treatments immigrants endure. These facilities are known for their inhumane treatment of those detained, for conditions that leave detainees malnourished and poorly bedded. These companies are run with a lack of accountability or transparency, encourage high recidivism rates, and underpay their employees. The private-prison industry is a scourge.

Contracts that call for states and federal agencies to guarantee high occupancy rates are coupled with a business mandate to return a profit to investors. These conspire to motivate private prison operators to foster a larger prison population while reducing costs (primarily in the areas of medical care, education, housing, and food).

Politicians with personal fiduciary interests in private prisons have discovered that they can mobilize their voting base by scapegoating the powerless, such as undocumented immigrants. For example, Arizona's SB 1070, which at the time of its passage in 2010 was the broadest and most restrictive anti-immigrant legislation in the country, was championed by politicians or their spouses with direct ties to Corrections Corporation of America, the largest for-profit incarceration company in Arizona.

Private prisons diminish America's reputation as a land of freedom and justice. As people of faith, we have a moral obligation to support legislators in pulling the plug on for-profit incarceration companies. We urge Homeland Security and ICE to move swiftly and stop their contracts with private prison corporations. We urge states to follow their examples.

Our faith compels us to treat the foreigner as a native and to love her as ourselves. We cannot do that and at the same time allow injustices by the private-prison industry to be perpetrated on people of color and immigrants in our communities.

We must work together to stop private prisons. That is the just and faithful thing to do. ■

*John Dorhauer is general minister and president of the United Church of Christ.*

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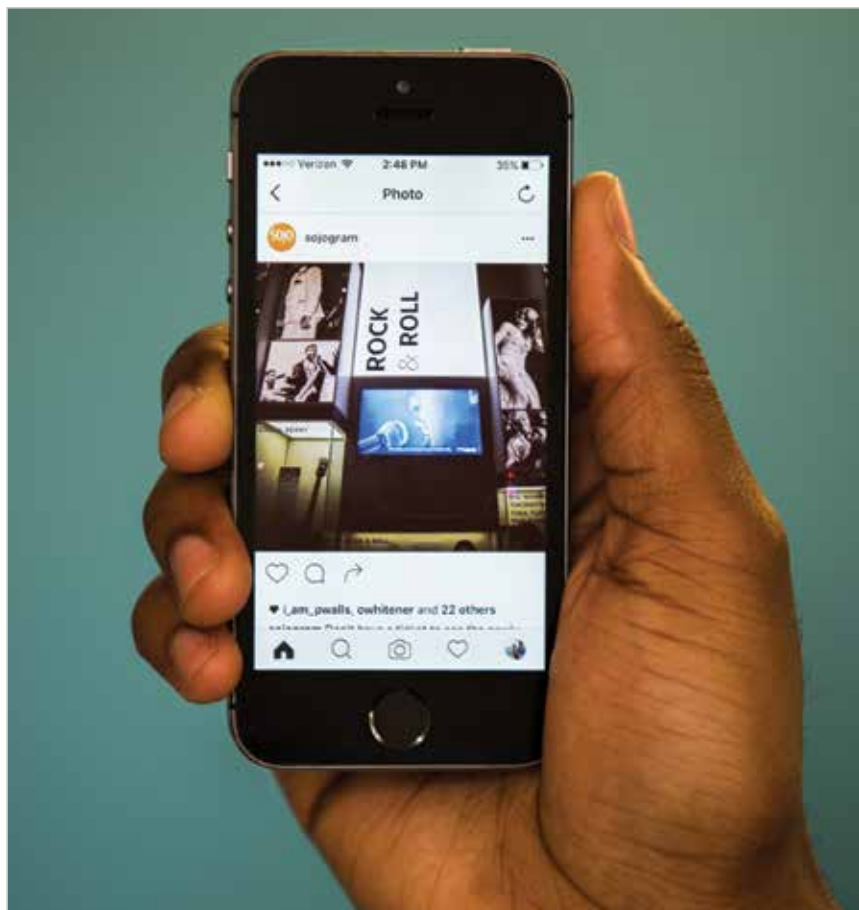


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## MEDIA



JP Keenan

**THE HOTTEST TICKET IN D.C.?** Itching to see the brand-new National Museum of African American History and Culture that opened in D.C. this fall? Bad news: Advanced tickets to see the museum are booked through spring 2017 (and going fast!). Fortunately, Sojourners online assistant Da'Shawn Mosley toured the museum on opening weekend. His assessment? Though the first few levels of the museum tell a story of "destruction and mutilation," he says that "what awaits you on the highest level of the building isn't a space filled with continued evidence of the evil that dismantled many black people," but rather "evidence of what black people put together."

See more at [sojo.net/nmaahc](http://sojo.net/nmaahc).

## IMMIGRATION

### Justice Detained

**E**arlier this year, the U.S. Department of Justice announced it would no longer use privately run federal prisons—for-profit businesses known to lobby for increased incarceration rates in order to maximize their own bottom line.

Yet, as David Beltrán explained in "Cárcel Privada and Me: A Personal Look at Private Immigrant Detention Centers" ([sojo.net/carcelprivada](http://sojo.net/carcelprivada)),



the announcement from the DOJ does not affect privately run state prisons nor the Department of Homeland Security's privately run

immigration detention centers—including the one in South Florida where his uncle was held for 20 days.

Maria-Jose Soerens, who provides mental health resources for immigrants in Seattle, shared the story ("The Lonely Oppression of Private Detention," [sojo.net/loneliness](http://sojo.net/loneliness)) of a woman in a privately run detention center who felt "Jesus' hand patting her on the back, whispering, 'You are going to be okay; you are going to be okay,'" while a guard mocked her.

"What does it mean that Jesus himself is showing up for brothers and sisters imprisoned in privately run detention facilities?" asked Soerens. "It means that the Spirit is engaged in an irresistible grassroots movement of liberation. But it also speaks to how lonely our brothers and sisters are and how much they need our help."

According to Soerens, the answer is not simply to pivot from privately run centers to government-run centers, but rather to "implement alternatives" rooted in community support—alternatives, Soerens noted, "with which the church is uniquely positioned to respond."

## QUOTED

**“What if Christian men prioritized practices that cultivate not only courage and strength, but vulnerability and sensitivity?”** —Ryan Stewart

on counterformational practices of American masculinity  
[sojo.net/masculinity](http://sojo.net/masculinity)

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CHANGING  
WORLD  
DARE TO  
THINK  
CRITICALLY  
AND ENGAGE  
DIFFERENTLY AS  
PROFESSIONAL  
COUNSELORS  
AND CAREGIVERS.**



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## True Heroism

**THE ATTENTION** generated by Captain Humayun Khan's Iraq war activities (as related by his father, Khizr Khan, at the Democratic National Convention) is not the first time that a military story was used to try to tamp down prejudice against U.S. Muslims. In 2008, Gen. Colin Powell responded to the charges about Barack Obama being a Muslim by saying "What if he is?" Powell then cited the image of a mother hugging the gravestone of her American Muslim son at Arlington Cemetery as an illustration of Muslim contributions to the nation.

I respect Captain Khan's military service. Yet I can't stop thinking about an issue that his father reportedly raised with him when he was leaving for Iraq: Are you troubled at all by this war? Lots of Americans were, concerned both about the questionable evidence used to jus-



Boxer Muhammad Ali speaks to reporters after refusing to be inducted into the U.S. military.

Archive photo

medical technician on his way to work on 9/11 when he saw the planes fly into the buildings. He rushed over to the site of the attacks to help whomever he could, and died in the rubble there. The police investigated him for possible ties to terrorism because of his Muslim faith and Pakistani heritage.

Shouldn't sacrificing your life to rescue others merit the embrace of others in your country, or at least shield you from their suspicion?

Then there is the Inner-City Muslim Action Network (IMAN), a nonprofit organization on the southwest side of Chicago founded and run by Muslims, which provides a suite of social services to the local community, from prisoner re-entry programs to street festivals for kids. In August, IMAN hosted a 50th anniversary commemoration of Martin Luther King Jr's march against housing discrimination in Chicago, which included the public unveiling of the first memorial to King in this city.

Shouldn't building an organization that creates interfaith partnerships to serve people in need be considered deserving of the nation's gratitude?

Finally, consider the

example of Muhammad Ali, an American Muslim whose heroism stems in part from his refusal to go to the Vietnam War. It was a decision he based on his Islamic faith, and it required him to sacrifice his heavyweight title and his boxing license during the prime years of his career.

When Ali died earlier this year, the country commemorated him with something like a state funeral. At the ceremony, comedian Billy Crystal told a story about being invited to go for a run with the champ at a local country club. Crystal informed Ali that he couldn't join him because the club didn't allow entry to Jews. Ali was incensed by the blatant bigotry, and said he'd never run at that club again.

The conviction that people should be treated equally came from his Muslim faith as well.

It's a reminder that sometimes refusing to go to war and choosing to fight bigotry on the home front is the most American thing of all. ■



*Eboo Patel, founder of the Interfaith Youth Core, writes about social justice from his perspective as a Muslim American.*

Sometimes refusing to go to war and choosing to fight bigotry on the home front is the most American thing of all.

tify the war and the many lives that were sure to be destroyed during it.

As most soldiers would, Captain Khan stated that decisions about which wars to fight were above his pay grade.

But it does raise a question for those American Muslims who were disturbed enough by the contours of the Iraq war to withhold their support: Are there ways other than going to a war you don't believe in to express your patriotism and be welcomed by your country?

I'd like to think that there are, and that American Muslims have in fact demonstrated them. Take Salman Hamdani, who was a young American Muslim emergency



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—Marianne Meye Thompson, George Eldon Ladd Professor of New Testament

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A wooden chessboard with a checkered pattern of light and dark brown squares. The board is populated with pieces that have two distinct designs. The top half of the board features dark blue circular pieces with a yellow silhouette of a soldier holding a rifle. The bottom half features light yellow circular pieces with a dark blue peace symbol. The word "Game" is written in a large, white, serif font across the center of the board.

# Game



# Changer?

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**Around the world, Catholics are becoming a church committed to peace and nonviolence. And the Vatican is listening.**

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**"JUST WAR IS KILLING US!** There is no just war."

That proclamation by a Catholic sister from Iraq, and others like it, resounded at a Vatican gathering this spring and fell on surprisingly receptive ears.

Sister Nazik Matty, an Iraqi Dominican, joined others from around the world in Rome in April to wrestle with how the Catholic Church could "recommit to the centrality of gospel nonviolence." She has watched members of her religious community die for lack of medical care during war.

“Please tell  
the world  
there  
is no such  
thing as a  
just war.  
I say this as  
a daughter  
of war.”

—Iraqi Dominican  
Sister Nazik Matty

“Which of the wars we have been in is a just war?” asked Sister Matty, who was driven from her home in Mosul by ISIS, also known by the Arabic acronym Daesh. “In my country, there was no just war. War is the mother of ignorance, isolation, and poverty. Please tell the world there is no such thing as a just war. I say this as a daughter of war.”

The Rome gathering on Nonviolence and Just Peace was unprecedented, bringing together members of the church hierarchy with social scientists, theologians, practitioners of nonviolence, diplomats, and unarmed civilian peacekeepers to discuss Catholic nonviolence and whether in the contemporary world armed force can ever be justified.

Of course, with such diverse participants, there was not a common mind on whether just war theory, a doctrine of military ethics used by Catholic theologians, has outlived its usefulness as church teaching.

Some of the academics and diplomats—particularly from the United States and Western Europe—maintained that just war criteria, when properly applied, are useful when working within halls of power, from the Pentagon to the United Nations, for restraining excessive use of military force by a state. One participant cautioned against “broad condemnations of just war tradition, if it means closing off dialogue with our allies.” Another questioned how diplomacy could continue without the just war framework as its common language.

But Catholics who came to Rome from conflict zones—Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Palestine, Colombia, Mexico, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, and Uganda—brought a different perspective.

#### **Just war theory isn't working**

Popes preach peace. And yet Catholic teaching allows for the possibility of morally sanctified use of armed force. If preaching peace is to be more than righteous hand-wringing, then the church needs a viable alternative to war, one that doesn't leave Catholics in one part of the world justifying war on Catholics in another part of the world.

“After Daesh/ISIS [took over the town] ... the church took responsibility for all of us,” Matty said. “It was encouraging to see such active presence of the church; not passive, but active. We can't respond to violence with worse violence. In order to kill five violent men, we have to create 10 violent men to kill them. This encourages the spiral of violence up and up. And the people are so exhausted because they don't know what's happening. It's like a dragon with seven heads. You cut one and two others come up.”

Therein lies the conundrum. Catholic just war criteria assume that a strategically applied use of violence under the right conditions will end violence, creating the possibility of peace. But in an era of weapons of mass destruction and borderless, serial conflicts, the approach no longer works. At least not from the perspective of those on the receiving end of the actions of the one remaining superpower.

“You [Americans] ask, can we talk to terrorists, can we



**Iraqi Dominican  
Sister Nazik Matty**

talk to ISIS in Iraq? The answer is yes!” said Matty. “But our destiny as Christians in Iraq is not controlled by ISIS. It is controlled by

the United States. ISIS in Iraq is a bunch of desperately hungry people who will kill for some bread. But if the rich people in the U.S., in Russia, in Europe stop arming them, then we will have life. We will live. Otherwise, we will die. If the rich want us to stay alive—as Christians in Iraq—then we will live. If the rich want us to die, then we will die.”

Hearing from people such as Sister Matty was a primary objective of the conference, according to Marie Dennis of Pax Christi International, co-convenor of the Vatican gathering, and great care was taken to ensure that the majority of those present were engaged in active peacemaking in circumstances of violence. “We wanted to listen carefully to what people in those situations have to say,” said Dennis, a lead conference organizer, “about the place of nonviolence in our church teaching.”

What they had to say was clear: Just war theory isn’t working. They want leadership from the church on strategic nonviolence when militants come to town. They want training in conflict resolution. They want to study the principles of active peacemaking. They want Catholics to be part of unarmed civilian protection teams. They want bishops and priests to stand publicly against violence, to preach on gospel nonviolence, and to stand shoulder to shoulder with laity in the streets. They want, as Pope Francis puts it, “shepherds who smell like their sheep.”

### Creating a theology of peace

Those gathered in Rome were picking up a conversation about whether it is ever theologically permissible to justify war, a debate that hasn’t been engaged at this level since Vatican II. Two key documents from the Vatican Council—“The Church in the Modern World” (*Guadium et spes*, 1965) and “Peace on Earth” (*Pacem in terris*, 1963)—repudiated war, especially given the development of nuclear weapons. They advocated for a more comprehensive peace than that provided by a policy of “mutual assured destruction.”

The documents didn’t abolish just war teaching, but they succeeded in building a strong Catholic theology of peace. “Although the idea and theory of a just war has not officially been repudiated,” wrote Catholic ethicist Lisa Sowle Cahill for the conference, “no pope since the Council has approved a war, or even mounted a defense of the justice of war in principle.”

Italian Bishop Luigi Bettazzi was one of the youngest bishops present at the Council. “It was suggested during the Council that every war should be condemned,” said Bettazzi at this year’s Rome gathering. “That is what Pope John [XXIII] did when he claimed that thinking that wars can bring justice and peace was silly [*alienum est a ratione*, or “alien to reason”]. It was only with the arrival of the Council

## 7 Elements of Just Peace

**JUST CAUSE:** protecting, defending, and restoring the fundamental dignity of all human life and the common good

**RIGHT INTENTION:** aiming to create a positive peace

**PARTICIPATORY PROCESS:** respecting human dignity by including societal stakeholders—state and nonstate actors as well as previous parties to the conflict

**RIGHT RELATIONSHIP:** creating or restoring just social relationships both vertically and horizontally; strategic systemic change requires that horizontal and vertical relationships move in tandem on an equal basis

**RECONCILIATION:** a concept of justice that envisions a holistic healing of the wounds of war

**RESTORATION:** repair of the material, psychological, and spiritual human infrastructure

**SUSTAINABILITY:** developing structures that can help peace endure over time

*Adapted from “What Kind of Peace Do We Seek?” by Maryann Cusimano Love, associate professor of international relations at the Catholic University of America, in Peacebuilding (Orbis Books, 2010).*

Every Christian must be a conscientious objector to total war.





# No Room for Fear

**For Christians in Pakistan and other Islamic countries, nonviolence is essential.**

**W**hen you live as a Christian in an Islamic country, there is no room for fear, no room for anger. You have to be patient. You have to be intelligent enough to live peacefully and nonviolently.

Once I was sitting all alone in the Catholic Church compound in Toba Tek Singh, a city in the Pakistani province of Punjab. The electricity had gone off, as outages are common in Pakistan. I was sitting below a huge tree. The compound gate was open. Suddenly, I saw a delegation coming down the road, led by the Islamic clerics—a huge group of them. I stood up to welcome them. I invited them to come into the courtyard. Unfortunately, they refused. They were very aggressive.

“Close your school immediately,” they told me. “You have co-education. You are giving wrong values. We are going to bomb it.”

In the group, there was one Muslim boy. “But Maulana Sahib,” he said, “the daughter of the local Maulana comes here for physiotherapy and they (the Christians) give it free of cost.” The Maulana (Muslim cleric) didn’t know what to say. He just walked away.

The immediate threat was over—but just by chance. I went into the church and looked at the crucifix: “Thank you, Jesus, for protecting us.”

I reflected on the incident. Here I was trying to get children to school. Now there was a threat to bomb the school. If I tell the parents that a delegation has given this threat, then the parents will not send their children to school. If I keep it a secret from parents, then what will I do if the school is attacked? I said a short prayer. I put my trust in Jesus’ suffering rather than in fear of the attackers. But these choices must be made daily.

We have to have strong faith when we work in challenging areas. We have to believe in Jesus. We have to believe in the cross. Those values alone will stand us in good stead.

We must have a spirituality that says no to war, no to militarization, no to weapons. All this talk of fighting the other has to end. Unless we go down the peaceful path, there will be no end to this killing, bomb blasts, death. Instead, let us teach and promote a culture of peace.

—Boniface Mendes

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*Boniface Mendes, a Catholic priest serving in Faisalabad, Pakistan, attended the conference in Rome on nonviolence and just peace.*

that total war—that in which civil population is affected—was condemned.”

Bishop Bettazzi added, “Now, every war is a total war, because they all affect the civil population, and therefore is against God and against humanity. [In this situation] a Catholic, a Christian, could never become a soldier.” Every Catholic, every Christian, he said, must be a conscientious objector to total war.

In the 50 years since the Council, two important things have happened.

One wing of the Catholic Church, startled by the strong peace message of Vatican II, pushed to embed just war criteria deeper into church teaching. Though just war theory had been a longstanding tradition for Catholics, it was not inserted into the catechism, the teaching principles of the church, until 1992.

Another wing of the church rose to embrace Pope Paul VI’s resounding call on the World Day of Peace in 1972: “If you want peace, work for justice!” Thousands of priests, religious, and lay people threw themselves into the work for social justice, economic development, and the promotion of peace as an expression of their Catholic faith.

These same Catholics watched as a broad school of Christian thought developed—predominately in Protestant and Anabaptist traditions—that judged just war to be obsolete and embraced the theology, principles, and practices of what has become known as “just peace.” This culminated in 2013 when the World Council of Churches, a body that represents more than 560 million Christians in Protestant, Orthodox, and other Christian denominations, announced that “by its calling and vocation the Christian church is to be a peace church.”

## The tools of nonviolence

What if the world’s 1.2 billion Catholics—half of Christians today—did the same?

In Pope Francis’ letter to the Rome gathering, he echoed his predecessors but went a step further. He wants to activate the church of the poor, the church of the people. “Humanity needs to refurbish all the best available tools to help the men and women of today to fulfill their aspirations for justice and peace,” the pope said. “Accordingly, your thoughts on revitalizing the tools of nonviolence, and of active nonviolence in particular, will be a needed and positive contribution.”

Cardinal Peter Turkson, president of the Vatican justice and peace office and co-sponsor of the Rome convocation, underscored Pope Francis’ message and noted some historical pitfalls: “It would be dangerous to identify the gospel message with this or that political program,” with nationalism or ideologies. “The Christian contribution to peace must take a different path.”

Determining “a different path” is the challenge. The answer lies in recommitting to the centrality of gospel nonviolence and developing practices of Catholic nonviolence and just peace. But what are the “tools of nonviolence,



**Bishop Paride Taban  
of South Sudan**

and of active nonviolence in particular”?

When Pope Francis refers to nonviolence, he is not referring to anything passive. Terrence Rynne, founder of the Center for Peacemaking at Marquette University in Milwaukee, put it this way: “The topic at issue here is proactive, positive, non-violent, strategic peacemaking—an emerging body of data, theology, and praxis that goes well beyond the false choices of justifying war or refusing to confront it.”

Just peace is an “orientation toward conflict transformation characterized by approaches that reduce violence and destructive cycles of social interaction and at the same time increase justice in any human relationship,” wrote sociologist John Paul Lederach. This is a new approach. A third way is emerging.

### **“The weapon of the church is love”**

Bishop Paride Taban of South Sudan provides an example of what active nonviolence looks like. The Sudanese Catholic, an instrumental leader in the formation of the new country of South Sudan, laughs easily, delighting that, as he approaches his 80th birthday, he can still dance and tell jokes. It could have been otherwise.

Bishop Taban has lived through Africa’s longest-running civil war. “From 1955, when I was a student, then from 1964 to 1972, when I was a priest, and from 1983 to 2005, when I was a bishop, and even now—war,” he says. And he’s gone through it all as an unarmed Christian peacemaker.

Taban is quick to say that he never abandoned his people in war. “I was in the middle of the people, with the people, for the people,” he says, “because my motto as a priest was ‘help your brothers and sisters in their difficulties.’ I wanted to keep that motto myself.”

As a result, the Sudanese People’s Liberation Army, a militant group in the second Sudanese civil war, took him and three other priests captive for 100 days in 1999. They lived in the bush, eating dry maize and wild fruits. “They mistreated me until my body produced lice,” he recalls. “We carried water, cooked for the officers. But I forgave them and looked at them the way I used to gaze at my mother when I was a child. I forgave them.” Like so many of his people, he still suffers the trauma of his experience.

In the midst of a brutal sectarian war, Taban founded the South Sudan Council of Churches, which was vital in bringing about the 2005 peace accord, and which even now he works to maintain. His priests were trusted by all sides in the conflict, and all sides—government forces as well as rebels—committed horrible atrocities, including extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, and rape as a weapon of war.

“To be a person of nonviolence is to have impartiality,” Taban says. “Be impartial! Not neutral, impartial. Have great love

## **From Just War to Just Peace**

**A** statement titled “An Appeal to the Roman Catholic Church to Re-Commit to the Centrality of Gospel Nonviolence” was released at the conclusion of the Rome conference in April. More than 1,300 individuals and 170 organizations have endorsed its direction, including all the Catholic bishops of Japan. The statement calls on the Catholic Church to:

**1** Continue developing Catholic social teaching on nonviolence. In particular, we call on Pope Francis to share with the world an encyclical on nonviolence and just peace.

**2** Integrate gospel nonviolence explicitly into the life, including the sacramental life, and work of the church through dioceses, parishes, agencies, schools, universities, seminaries, religious orders, voluntary associations, and others.

**3** Promote nonviolent practices and strategies (e.g., nonviolent resistance, restorative justice, trauma healing, unarmed civilian protection, conflict transformation, and peacebuilding strategies).

**4** Initiate a global conversation on nonviolence within the church, with people of other faiths, and with the larger world to respond to the monumental crises of our time with the vision and strategies of nonviolence and just peace.

**5** No longer use or teach “just war theory”; continue advocating for the abolition of war and nuclear weapons.

**6** Lift up the prophetic voice of the church to challenge unjust world powers and to support and defend those nonviolent activists whose work for peace and justice puts their lives at risk.

*The Catholic Nonviolence Initiative is a consortium of attendees from the Rome conference and others who are advocating for a papal encyclical on nonviolence. Read the full statement at [nonviolencejustpeace.net](http://nonviolencejustpeace.net).*

**If preaching peace is to be more than  
righteous hand-wringing, then the  
church needs a viable alternative to war.**



# 'An Abundance of Cultural Differences'

**Catholics from different parts of the world have widely divergent experiences—and contrasting approaches to “just war.”**

**“W**e can joyfully anticipate an abundance of cultural differences and varied life experiences among the participants in the Rome Conference,” wrote Pope Francis in his welcome letter to the Nonviolence and Just Peace gathering in Rome, “and these will only enhance the exchanges and contribute to the renewal of the active witness of nonviolence as a ‘weapon’ to achieve peace.”

Nowhere were the “cultural differences” and “varied life experiences” more conspicuous than in the conversation about whether there is ever a Christian justification for armed force.

U.S. and Western European academics are thoroughly trained in the theory, theology, and application of just war theory. It’s

**I put my trust in Jesus’ suffering rather than in fear of the attackers. But these choices must be made daily.**

taught in U.S. and European seminaries. It’s taught in all military academies. It provides a framework for international law.

In stark contrast, Catholics living in Iraq, Sudan, Uganda, Afghanistan, Syria, Congo, Sri Lanka, and other war-torn countries are not schooled in just war philosophy. It is not part of training for priests or academics or

Continued on next page

for the people. Be a shepherd. A shepherd is one who has love for all the sheep. That is what Jesus taught us.”

Taban founded the 2,500-acre Holy Trinity peace village near the banks of the Kuron River, 170 miles east of Juba, South Sudan. “I wanted to build a place where different tribes, with generations of animosity, could live together and provide for themselves,” he said in a 2013 interview. When he started the village, Bishop Taban lived in a tent alongside 81 families. Now he has a small room, and the village has more than 3,000 people working productive fields. The village is a no-gun haven in a highly armed society.

“The weapon of the church is love,” says Taban. “The church is a mother and has a strong weapon: Love for everybody. In South Sudan, the church has been with all the people but never ever advocated for weapons. I destroyed all my guns that I used for hunting birds. The church has to be a place where there are no guns, and no fear.” Taban adds, “Whenever I am asked to turn over my weapons [at a checkpoint], I say: ‘My Lord has already come and taken them all away.’”

## **“We need a clear message”**

Similar stories were shared by Catholics living between brutal militants in Colombia. “We faced radical opposition when we were working in the Magdalena region for 14 years,” says Francisco De Roux, a Jesuit priest.

“Our purpose was to accompany the regional communities in a program of development and peace in the middle of the conflict,” says De Roux. “But the paramilitaries assassinated 24 persons on our team, and the guerillas killed three of our companions.” Despite these violent attacks, De Roux says, “I am certain that because of the generosity of my companions, women and men, and due to the way they devoted themselves to protect life and dignity in extreme difficulties, the Magdalena process became a reference [point] in the construction of structural peace.”

There are now 24 programs for development and peace across Colombia, says De Roux, all of which contributed to the recent peace negotiations, and which will monitor and maintain the Colombian accords in the future. In August, De Roux offered himself as a hostage in exchange for Odin Sanchez, a former Colombian congressperson held captive by ELN guerilla forces.

Most of the participants who told these stories had little training in nonviolence, conflict resolution, or unarmed civilian peacekeeping; had not been taught a theology of nonviolence other than what they could glean from the gospels; and received scant support or protection from the institutional church.

“We need a clear message from the church—from the pope to the grassroots—that the church stands for nonviolence,” said South Sudan’s Bishop Taban. “We are the voice of the church, and we are coming here to say that this is the need of the church. We want an encyclical.” A major teaching document, along the lines of the Vatican’s work





**Jesuit priest  
Francisco De Roux**

on climate change, could have a significant impact across the breadth of the Catholic Church and beyond.

In Rome, Mairead Maguire, winner of the 1976 Nobel Peace Prize, honed in on this point: “If we haven’t taught the church’s way of nonviolence, then we only leave people with two options: fight or flight.”

The just war tradition taught how to fight. The pacifist tradition, when constrained to a point of individual conscience, often resulted in flight.

Pope Francis has described our times as “World War III—but in installments.” Deadly conflict is increasing around the world, most significantly in the last five years. Vatican II’s predictions about “total war” are the stark reality of daily news. The church stands at a watershed: Will it reject the necessity of armed force? Will it counsel the state strongly and clearly against the use of violence? Will it promote active, effective alternatives to armed force? Will it confront the evil so clearly at work in the world with the sword of peace?

### **Effective alternatives to war**

Across the world, effective alternatives to war are emerging. People are doing serious work to advance these alternatives, to mainstream them, and to scale them up. “Currently 12 international, nongovernmental organizations and many more local groups provide unarmed civilian protection in 17 areas of violent conflict,” says Mel Duncan, founding director of Nonviolent Peaceforce. In one year, Nonviolent Peaceforce trained more than 14,000 people in conflict-affected communities in unarmed civilian protection.

Just peace principles are becoming more robust. They have been applied in interfaith contexts, in arguing against drone warfare, in analyzing the global war on women, and by Catholic aid agencies providing service in conflict zones.

The conversation is no longer about justifying cases where armed force may be legitimized, nor is it about the pacifism of personal conscience. The focus is on marrying the vast amounts of peacemaking research, civil resistance tactics, and just peace principles with the deep, pervasive peace theology of the church.

Pope Francis named his agenda when he took the name of the saint from Assisi: a church of the poor, praise of creation, and gospel nonviolence.

Following the Rome conference, Pope Francis elevated the position of Cardinal Turkson’s council, giving it greater power and responsibility. He also announced the theme for the 50th celebration of the World Day of Peace on Jan. 1: nonviolence. ■

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*Rose Marie Berger, a senior associate editor of Sojourners, is a Catholic peace activist and poet. She contributed a framing paper on just peace to the April conference in Rome.*

Continued from previous page

those in political life. When people from war-ravaged regions talk about “just war,” they speak from the experience of having been on the receiving end of “morally acceptable” drone strikes. They make a powerful argument for a paradigm shift away from just war thinking.

In regions of civil unrest, some said, where religious extremism is used as propaganda to advance partisan military and political objectives, even associating the language of “just war” with Catholicism can categorize Catholics as “combatants.”

In the case of Colombia’s brutal, 52-year-long civil war, Jesuit priest Francisco De Roux described how just war teaching misled Catholics into taking up arms. “In my Catholic country,” said De Roux, “our nuns and priests join the guerrillas because of the just war paradigm. The Catholic paramilitaries pray to the Virgin before slaughtering people because of the just war paradigm.”

It became clear through encounter, questions, clarifications, and dialogue that Western Catholic seminaries teach just war as the nearly exclusive framework on war and peace issues. Seminaries in the majority world are much more likely to turn to nonprofits and secular sources to learn about conflict resolution, large-scale peacekeeping, and social movement organizing.

This disparity might reflect the historical roots of the just war tradition itself as a set of criteria developed by powerbrokers—political, military, and ecclesial—for powerbrokers, not by the vast populace directly affected by war. —RMB





# Mary's Role Models

**Heroic women in the Bible likely had a strong effect on Mary—and on Jesus.**

*by* **RETA HALTEMAN FINGER**

**DID MARY KNOW**, on that puzzling and fateful afternoon when the angel Gabriel visited her, that she was about to join a line of mothers in Israel who would be remembered and honored within a tradition dominated by men?

Did she think of her forebear and namesake, Miriam, co-deliverer of her people from Egyptian slavery? Did Deborah, prophet and judge, come to mind—or Jael, the housewife who drove a tent peg into the brain of an enemy general? Had anyone told this nonliterate young woman about Huldah, the prophet and scholar who identified Deuteronomy as sacred scripture? Surely Queen Esther, who saved her people from a Persian pogrom, was known to Mary from the annual festival of Purim.

More likely Mary would have remembered women in Israel who gave birth to important men, such as Samson and Samuel. The late pregnancy of her cousin Elizabeth brought Isaac's mother, Sarah, into view.

But her own premarital pregnancy may have reminded her more of Bathsheba, mother of Solomon. In this patriarchal culture, wives who could not conceive were disgraced and considered of little worth, but pregnancy before marriage could result in an honor killing. No wonder Mary fled to Elizabeth as the only person who might understand her unusual plight (Luke 1:39-45). Guided by the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth enabled Mary to turn her fear into a song of praise adapted from Hannah's prayer after her son Samuel was born (Luke 1:46-56; 1 Samuel 2:1-10). God lifts up the lowly and brings down the proud.

**What did Jesus learn from the lives of these three heroic women?**

Illustration by M.P. Wiggins







If she pondered her place in Israelite history, did Mary also think of more-recent heroes? If Hanukkah was celebrated in Nazareth each year, she would have known how the second temple in Jerusalem had been rededicated to Yahweh after its desecration by the Seleucid ruler Antiochus IV, 160 years earlier. Hanukkah acclaimed the successful Maccabean revolt and subsequent Judean independence; it also exalted Judith, whose name means “Jewish woman”; she saved Israel from destruction by beheading the Assyrian general Holofernes.

In Mary’s day, knowledge of these past events evoked similar longings for freedom from the Roman occupation of Palestine. Would Mary’s son lead the next revolt? The angel had promised that “the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David” and “he will reign over the house of Jacob forever” (Luke 1:32-33). Mary had prophesied that “all generations will call me blessed” (1:48). Perhaps she will become another Judith!

### What happened between testaments?

But who is Judith? For many Christians today, the 400-plus years between the last Old Testament prophets and the coming of Jesus in the New Testament is a dark hole. As a child, I recall hearing Matthew 4:16 read at my church during Advent: “The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light.” At the time, I figured everyone just sat around in the dark waiting for Jesus.

But high school world history taught us about the conquests of Alexander the Great, the spread of Greek culture and language throughout the Mediterranean world, and the subsequent rise of the Roman Empire. Throughout this period, the Jewish diaspora increased as well. The Hebrew Bible was gradually translated into Greek, probably in Egypt. Called the Septuagint, it also embraced more-recent Jewish writings in Greek. The Septuagint, which was the Bible of the early Christians for the first 300 years, included the intertestamental books Protestants call the Apocrypha. Today, neither Jews nor Protestants consider these books canonical, although Catholics include them, following early church tradition. In any case, these writings open a

window into Jewish thought and life during these intervening centuries.

### Theology trumps history

The 16-chapter book of Judith, from the first or second century BCE, reads more like a historical novel than literal history. It is set in Judea not long after Jews have returned from exile in Babylon. They are now threatened by Nebuchadnezzar, who rules the Assyrians from Nineveh (Judith 1:1). Historically, however, the Assyrians were long gone by this time, conquered by the Babylonians (under Nebuchadnezzar!), who are then taken over by the Persians. It is the Persian king Cyrus who first allowed Jews to return

## Pregnancy before marriage in Mary’s time and culture could result in an honor killing.

from Babylon to Judea in 538 BCE to rebuild the Jerusalem temple.

Theology, not history, dominates in this story—the Deuteronomistic theology that promises blessings and safety from enemies if the Jewish people worship only Yahweh, and defeat and destruction if they worship other gods (see Deuteronomy 30:15-20). The author probably chose Nebuchadnezzar as antagonist because he declares himself a god—“the Great King, the lord of the whole earth” (Judith 2:5; see Daniel 3:1-18). Nebuchadnezzar sends his chief general, Holofernes, to subdue all the peoples in the region who have not yet submitted to the Great King. To underscore this Deuteronomistic theology, Achior, an Ammonite, recounts to Holofernes the history of the Israelites, explaining that they will be protected by their God so long as they worship Yahweh alone.

The Israelites at this time are centered in the hill country, in the fictional town of Bethulia. Determined to defeat them, Holofernes cuts off their water supply. Uzziah, the ineffectual Jewish leader, is ready to cave in if no help comes within five days.

### “By the hand of a woman ...”

Enter Judith in chapter 8. With an impressive genealogy, she is the devout widow of her deceased husband, Manasseh. Unlike Uzziah, she knows how to save Israel if the Israelites are faithful to Yahweh. After

receiving the blessing of Uzziah and his cohorts, Judith prays fervently to God, using the language of reversals adopted many years later by Mary: “You are the God of the lowly, helper of the oppressed, upholder of the weak, protector of the forsaken, savior of those without hope” (Judith 9:11; Luke 1:51-55). But unlike Mary, all her forthcoming actions depend on deceiving the enemy.

Judith casts off her widow’s garments and decks herself out in fine clothes, makeup, and jewelry. She puts food in a bag and then, with her maid, heads for the Assyrian army. A patrol captures them, and she asks to see Holofernes in order to show

him a way to conquer the Israelites without losing a single soldier. Convinced and overcome by her beauty, Holofernes prepares a banquet and invites her as his special guest, even though she and her maid eat only their own kosher food.

Holofernes asks her what she will do when she runs out of her own food. As an example of irony and double entendre in the story, she replies, “As surely as you live, my lord, your servant will not use up the supplies I have with me before the Lord” (the Lord!) “carries out by my hand what he has determined” (12:4). On the last night of the banquet, Holofernes invites her into his tent to drink wine and thus seduce her. His eunuchs leave, and she is alone with him. Her maid stands outside to wait.

Holofernes drinks himself comatose, whereupon Judith takes his sword from the bedpost and chops off his head. She puts it into their food bag, and she and her maid return to Bethulia, where she shows the people the head of Holofernes. Uzziah praises Judith in words we recognize from Elizabeth’s response to Mary in Luke 1:41b-42a: “O daughter, you are blessed by the Most High God above all other women on earth!” (Judith 13:18).

When the Assyrians see Holofernes’ head on the wall of Bethulia, they flee in terror. The Israelites follow and slaughter many, claiming rich spoils. Judith is given Holofernes’ possessions and then leads the

women of Israel in a victory dance. The book ends with her hymn of praise to God for saving their nation.

Through her courage and faithfulness, Judith shames the Israelite men of Bethulia, but she still operates within a patriarchal context of sexual conquest and violence. Her culture would have permitted only a respectable and devout widow like her to use sexual allure as a weapon. And after her triumph over Holofernes and his army, she returns home and submits to her proper role as a celibate widow.

### Susanna

Mary's other role model from the intertestamental writings must also operate within a male-dominated context. Susanna's story comprises chapter 13 of the Greek version of the book of Daniel, probably written in the first or second century BCE. It is a detective story set much earlier in Babylon among the exiled Jews.

By this time some Jews are living comfortably, judging by the respect given to Susanna's husband, Joakim, and the fact that he owns a house with a large garden. These Jews apparently reside in their own quarters in Babylon and are free to observe the law of Moses. Joakim's house serves as a court where the elders meet to try cases within their own legal system. Even so, Daniel, an exile from Jerusalem, is anachronistically still a "young lad" (verse 44).

Like all heroic women in patriarchal narratives, Susanna is gorgeous! So much so that two elders, recently appointed as judges, who come to Joakim's house on court days, start lusting after her. Each day, after the others leave at noon, Susanna takes walks in the garden, where they can barely tear their eyes away from her. Eventually they confess their lust to each other, and then make a plan to find a time when they can get her alone and rape her.

One hot day they hide in the garden at a time when Susanna wants to bathe. She sends her maids away to get some supplies and then shuts the doors of the garden for privacy. The two men run up to her and confess their desire for her. If she refuses, they will "testify against you that a young man was with you, and this was why you sent your maids away" (verse 21). Trapped, Susanna loudly refuses to comply "rather

than sin in the sight of the Lord" (verse 23), so the men bring charges of adultery against her before the full court the next morning. She could do nothing but lift her eyes to heaven, "for her heart trusted in the Lord" (verse 35). But because these men were judges, they were believed, and Susanna was condemned to death, against her strong protestations of innocence.

Detective Daniel to the rescue! As Susanna is led off to execution, "the Lord heard her cry." Daniel challenges the verdict and interviews each man separately. He asks each one, "Under what tree did you see [Susanna and the young man] being intimate with each other?" Each man mentions a different tree, whereupon Daniel declares them guilty of bearing false witness. In accordance with the law of Moses, they are put to death (Deuteronomy 19:16-21). Thus God vindicates the innocent sufferer.

### What did Mary teach?

How might Mary have been influenced by either Judith or Susanna? Israelite women are so rarely mentioned in scripture that it is quite possible that their stories were carefully handed on from one generation of women to the next. Some of Mary's statements echo those of Judith. She was willing to be the instrument of God in raising a special son, just as Judith became God's instrument to defeat Israel's enemy. Like Susanna, Mary submitted herself to God's purposes while standing up for her innocence and righteousness.

What did Mary, who pondered much in her heart (Luke 2:19), teach her son about Judith and Susanna? Mary's story in Luke 1 gives no hint of the nonviolent path Jesus followed as an adult. He did not attempt to overthrow Roman occupation, as his Maccabean ancestors had resisted the Syrian-Greeks, nor did he use deceit to commit murder, as did Judith. Perhaps Susanna, submitting to God while proclaiming her innocence, provided a better role model. What do you think Jesus learned from the lives of these heroic women? ■

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**Reta Halteman Finger**, an affiliate associate professor of New Testament at Eastern Mennonite University in Harrisonburg, Va., writes a Bible study blog at [ewc.com/RetasReflections](http://ewc.com/RetasReflections).





## Advent Candles

*for St. Teresa of Avila*

Lighting these candles—porous and buoyant—  
Grounds us

Flames draw our eyes to heavens dotted white  
With celestial thought

To look back in time through the stars  
Hundreds of light-years away

To glimpse God standing  
On the shore of God's self

With outrageous visions and promises  
Of hope that strain our belief

What can we do with such promises?  
With tradition that grounds us in hope

In stars    in candles    in souls set alight?

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*Pamela S. Wynn, author of *Diamonds on the Back of a Snake*, is an adjunct professor at United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities in Minnesota.*



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# Can Business Be

# Beautiful?

**Definitely, says evangelical social entrepreneur John Rush.**

*by* **SUSAN K. SMITH**

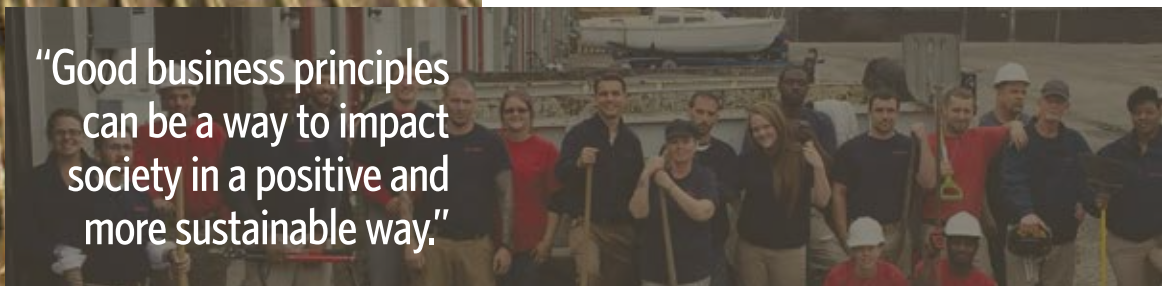
**THE FIRST TIME** I saw John Rush was during a 2015 political forum at a local high school in Columbus, Ohio. Rush was running for city council, and though all the candidates had been invited, many didn't bother to show up. As Rush began his presentation, he brought empty chairs up on the stage and made some quip about how the chairs were waiting for the absent candidates. The joke was not cryptic or unkind; it drew gentle laughter and applause from the audience. I didn't know what party Rush belonged to, but I was captivated.

As a longtime pastor in Columbus, I'd seen a lot of candidates for city council. All of them had the usual rash of promises: They would create jobs; they cared about "the least of these"; they listened to the hearts of the people. Voting for them would help change the world.

CleanTurn  
Enterprises  
founder  
John Rush

Photos courtesy of CleanTurn

"Good business principles can be a way to impact society in a positive and more sustainable way."







Staff members of CleanTurn Enterprises

But Rush seemed different. Though he was a white man with a military-style buzzcut speaking to a room full of African Americans, he didn't seem shy or uncomfortable. He didn't make a lot of promises. He just talked about how he knew what people were going through, and his knowledge seemed genuine, like he had "been there." He mentioned growing up really poor, in Appalachia, and how that felt. He joked about being an evangelical who cared about more than the wedge issues of abortion and same-sex marriage. He talked about knowing how to listen to and appreciate all kinds of people. Nobody, it seemed, was an outsider to him.

Rush eventually lost his bid for election, but the more I learned about him, the more fascinated I became. He spent his early years in a trailer park surrounded by racism, joined the Marines, and later returned to the Midwest to help found a nondenominational church in Chicago. He now runs a business that helps people who were incarcerated or caught in human trafficking reintegrate into society. He was an ordinary person, leading an extraordinary life.

And his commitment seemed rare. Many church people are willing to give money for various causes, but far fewer Christians want to be in the midst of people who are hurting—touching them, feeding them, talking to them, and seeing them as human beings with needs and untapped capabilities. Rush was saying his faith called him *to* people, not compelling him to remain comfortable.

### A "huge disconnect"

"It was a pretty impoverished neighborhood," says Rush of the West Virginia trailer park where he grew up with his father. "We had a mattress, two cardboard boxes, and a couple of toy trucks." In that trailer park, white people were pretty glad they were white, and they weren't afraid to admit it; the Confederate flag was part of the landscape. At the same time, there were people there who didn't seem to care at all about race but just tried to survive crippling poverty.

Despite their poverty, Rush and his dad had a rich life together. "I didn't know we were poor because my dad took a lot of time with me, and we played a lot," says Rush. The pair eventually moved to Charleston, W.Va.—like "moving to New York City," remembers Rush—where Rush's world began to expand. Though the West Virginia trailer park had been mostly white, in Charleston he went to an integrated school. He "met a lot of other folks who looked different," including Albert, his first black friend. Through his friendship with Albert, Rush became aware that there was a stark difference between the way black and white people lived, even in poverty.

And though they lived in poverty, his parents reminded him that God called them to help others. Rush credits his stepmother for teaching him, mostly by example, about service. "It exposed me to the needs of people in the community and also to the fragility of life," says Rush. One day, while volunteering at a nursing home as an adolescent, Rush noticed that the old people were too often sitting alone. "I remember thinking that one day I'm going to be sitting in one of these places, and I want to live a life of purpose," he explains.

When Rush was 13, he went to Cleveland to live with his biological mother, a recovering drug addict who had left him and his father when Rush was a toddler. In Cleveland, Rush began attending a fundamentalist

Baptist church, where his curiosity about Christianity began in earnest. He loved studying the requirements of his faith. During high school he encouraged the student body to think about how they could reach out to the homeless community. "I didn't know what that meant, really. I still don't," admits Rush, chuckling slightly, "but I knew it was something we needed to be concerned about."

But it wasn't until later in life—after his tour of duty as a Marine, when Rush had returned to the Midwest—that Rush began to think about how the inequity he saw as a child, the life of service modeled by his stepmother, and his faith might all work together. At the time, Rush was mentoring men who formerly had been homeless on Chicago's West Side and sharing with them the importance of a relationship with God. But as Rush described it, he realized there was a "huge disconnect between the idea of the world to come and everyday life."

"I realized that part of the Christian faith is the integration into everyday life, and I had to ask, 'What does that mean for me, personally?'" Rush explains. "It's more than talking about Christian ideas; it's about policy, community development, substance abuse, human trafficking, racial discrimination, poverty."

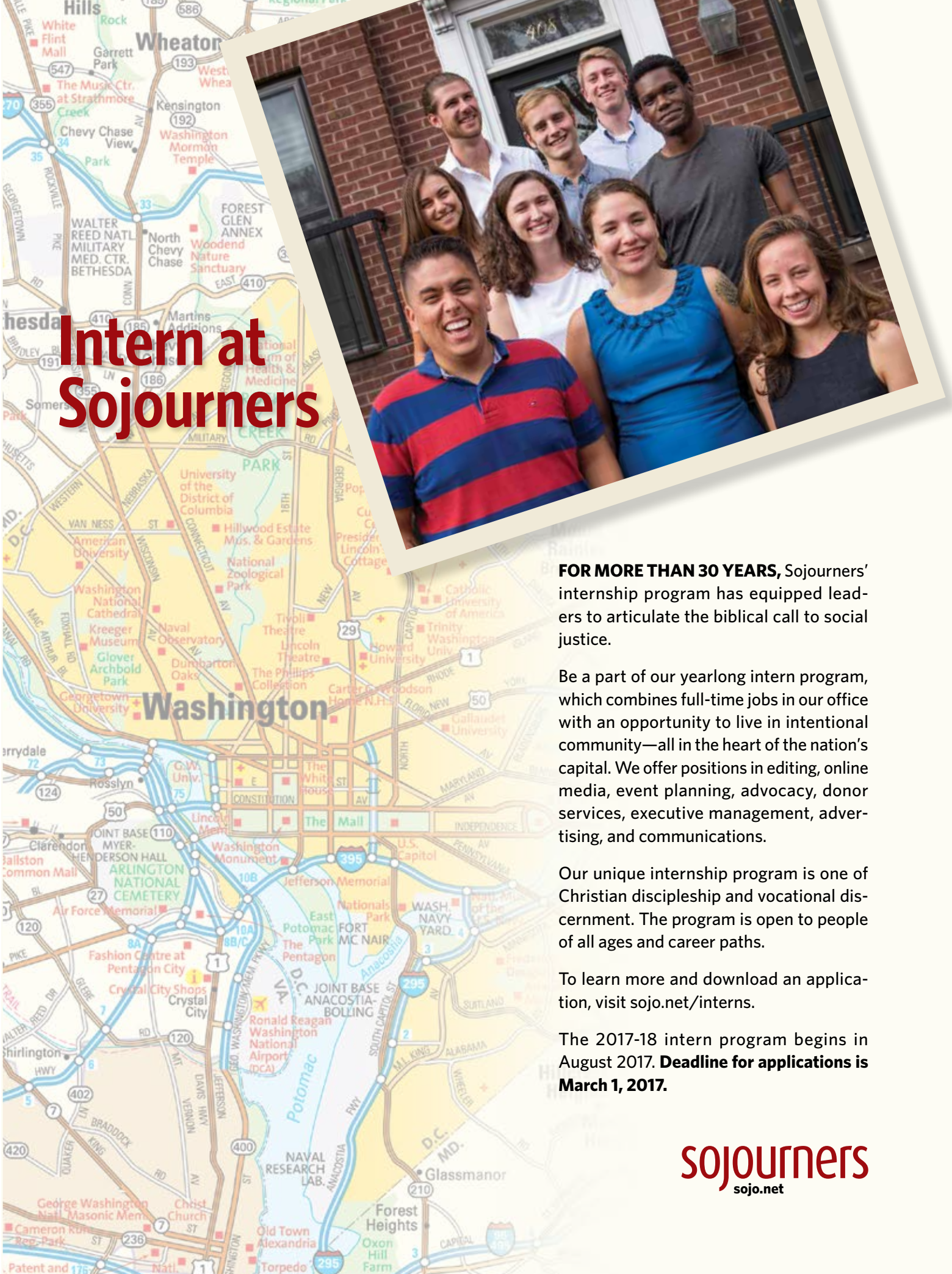
### Money vs. love of money

By the time Rush had this realization—that a living faith meant his business should attend to the needs of people—he had acquired five master's degrees in everything from theology to business management. In 2011 he and others started a conversation with philanthropic investors who wanted to launch a social enterprise. According to Rush, a social enterprise is an entity structured to maximize its bottom line in a way that maximizes its mission outcomes. Typically, an enterprise like this is "a service-based business,"

Continued on Page 34

He didn't make a lot of promises. He just talked about how he knew what people were going through.





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Continued from Page 32

he explains, “designed to create training, employment, and career opportunities for men and women who have significant barriers to employment.”

Rush and some investors began to figure out how they could meld this vision of business and faith. They began seeking funds from venture capitalists and others to launch CleanTurn Enterprises in 2012. CTE’s focus was to incubate business lines, including a demolition service and a cleaning company, that would provide jobs and job training for people who had significant challenges in their pasts, such as incarceration, drug addiction, alcoholism, and intergenerational poverty. Rush felt that these people were being punished for their weaknesses, and he wanted to do something to help them turn their lives around.

And he did: In the past five years, CTE has hired more than 400 people who have learned specific job skills plus the relational abilities necessary to get a job and keep it: conflict management, discipline, and how to balance the demands of employment. Though CTE is a for-profit business, Rush says making money is not the driver. “It’s not money that is the root of all evil, it’s the love of money,” says Rush, correcting the often-misquoted passage of scripture. “Good business principles can be a way to impact society in a positive and more sustainable way. It requires constant, vigilant introspection and examination of one’s heart to make sure the heart is in the right place.”

The profits CleanTurn earns help pay for the mentoring and coaching it provides to its staff. “Our fundamental purpose in maximizing profit ... is to maximize our capacity to invest in our staff and their professional and personal development,” says Rush. “We have an ambitious plan for how we want to leverage our profit to feed growth and invest it in the development of our team members.”

But developing the staff, many of whom have not been successful in the workplace, can be difficult. “We demand excellence,” says Rush. “If they are tardy, we have to teach them that being late to work is not acceptable. If the behavior continues, we sometimes have to let them go. That hurts because we want them to be successful, but there are things every individual has to do in order to make it in the workplace. There are no exceptions. We do them no favors if we just let them slide when they need to be called on what they do or do not do.”

### Beauty, business

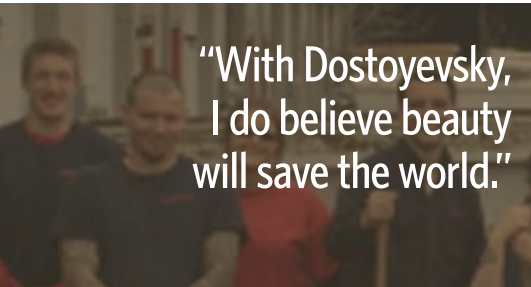
As Rush sees it, all of his responsibilities and relationships are governed by the same ethical principle. “With Dostoyevsky, I do believe beauty will save the world,” says Rush. “I long to be captivated every day by what I understand to be a love that is, in the end, indescribable but radically transforming.”

As a business owner, Rush believes saving the world with beauty means using his skills as an entrepreneur to help “the least of these” get on their feet and stay there. According to Rush, he gets glimpses of this beauty from reading scripture, especially the psalms and the gospels. Yet he also admits that beauty often shows up in less-likely places.

“It breaks through in the most unpredictable scenes of life,” says Rush. “Walking down an alley and past a vacant and abandoned house, there are sounds of laughter, tears, and memories that I do not know if in fact existed, but my imagination paints the scene. I feel the hopes, the dreams, the frustrations, the longings of family.”

“I do not have the capacity to know what the ‘best’ business model might be, though I will continue to read, study, and learn what I can,” he says. “But as one small voice in this grand conversation, I have one ultimate longing, a longing for all things to be made right—for beauty to save the world. Until such time, in whatever degree I can, I want to reflect such beauty in everything I am engaged in.” ■

**“Good business principles can be a way to impact society in a positive and more sustainable way. It requires constant, vigilant introspection and examination of one’s heart to make sure the heart is in the right place.”**



**“With Dostoyevsky,  
I do believe beauty  
will save the world.”**

*Susan K. Smith is founder and director of Crazy Faith Ministries in Columbus, Ohio, and a communication consultant of the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference. She is working on an authorized biography of civil rights organizer C.T. Vivian.*

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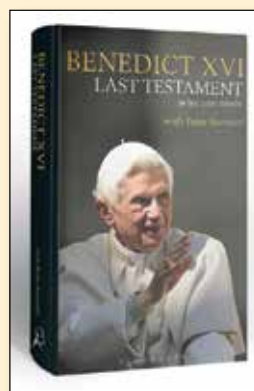
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Pope Benedict XVI  
Bloomsbury Publishing  
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This Christmas, Pope Benedict breaks his silence on the defining issues of his papacy and the future of the Catholic Church. Available Nov. 15 wherever books are sold.



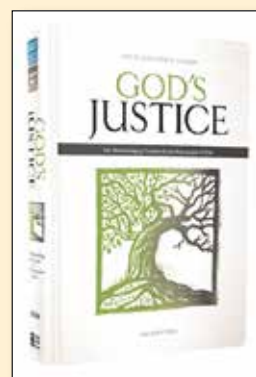
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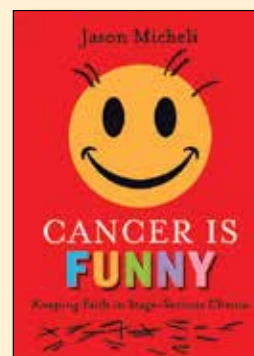
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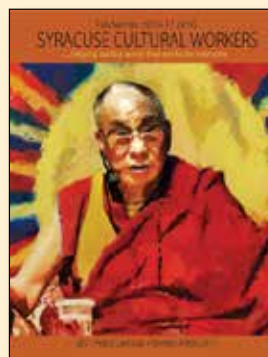


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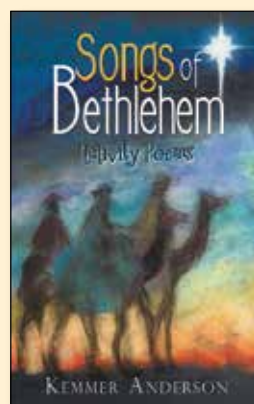


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Get ready to breathe deeply and relax with *Rejuve II*. It's the perfect accompaniment for guided meditations, spa-like relaxation, and simply drifting away from the stresses of the day. 100% of the proceeds from the sales of *Rejuve II* will be donated to The Breathing Butterfly project aimed at reducing harmful stress cortisol in children. Promo code: Butterfly



### **Songs of Bethlehem**

Kemmer Anderson

Xlibris

[amazon.com](http://amazon.com)

Sonnets and free verse celebrate incarnation history. For example: "But this child's beating heart / alters Roman policy from the start." The poems explore the geography of Palestine surrounding the biblical narratives and their characters.

## Piracy and Puritanism at Wells Fargo

**I OPENED MY** first savings account at Wells Fargo in Sacramento, Calif., when I was 8 years old. I remember the bronze stagecoach penny bank they gave me to help me practice saving. When I moved to Washington, D.C., I put my money into a D.C.-based bank, soon bought out by Wells Fargo. But it wasn't the same Wells Fargo I'd grown up with.

In 2012, the Justice Department found Wells Fargo guilty of discriminating against both African-American and Latino borrowers during the subprime mortgage heist. It's one of the top two banks invested in the Corrections Corporation of America, which is one of the largest for-profit prison companies in the U.S. In 2015, Wells Fargo was the world's largest bank.

This fall, Wells Fargo CEO John Stumpf, who abruptly resigned in October, was called before a congressional investigative committee to answer accusations that thousands of Wells Fargo employees secretly opened 2 million fraudulent accounts without customers' permission or knowledge, and were incentivized by the company to do so. Employees opened false banking and credit card accounts, transferred funds, and created phony access codes and email



Wells Fargo's then-CEO John Stumpf testifying before Congress.

Wells Fargo claims that it has fired 5,300 people since 2011 related to these practices, but details are vague; the fraud investigators were hired by Wells Fargo. We don't know how many were fired because they couldn't fulfill the extortionate sales quotas.

Bank employees were "terrorized," said Black. They were "viciously threatened—with getting fired—and not just occasionally: Four times a day they were called in on whether they had met their quotas."

In the congressional hearings, Sen. Elizabeth Warren called Stumpf out, with the prophetic clarity of Isaiah. "You squeezed your employees to the breaking point," said Warren, "so they would cheat customers and you could drive up the value of your stock and put hundreds of millions of dollars in your own pocket. And when it all blew up, you kept your job, you kept your multi-million-dollar bonuses, and you went on television to blame thousands of \$12-an-hour employees who were just trying to meet cross-sell quotas that made you rich."

Wells Fargo has agreed to settle out of court for \$190 million—about \$100 per alleged felony. "Anyone would gladly trade \$100, with no admissions of fact and no guilty plea, to escape being prosecuted for a felony," Black said.

The frauds are chump change, however, compared to the real moneymaker for

senior executives: cross-selling junk products, which Wells Fargo does at more than twice the rate of its competitors.

Cross-selling is predatory "up-selling." For example, if you're already maxed out on two credit cards, Wells Fargo will offer you a third. If you keep bouncing checks, Wells Fargo will sell you overdraft protection. While interest rates are low, incentive is high to convert people to products with fees or higher interest rates.

Wells Fargo drives cross-selling, according to Black, "by precisely the same extortionate incentives that produced the frauds. In this environment the products being sold will frequently be harmful for the customer."

ABOUT FIVE YEARS ago, I pulled all my money out of Wells Fargo. In my exit interview with the branch manager, I listed the reasons I thought Wells Fargo was acting as an unregulated scourge across the U.S. economy and preying on the economically vulnerable. He politely ushered me out.

Advent is a time to push back against what Walter Brueggemann calls "the data of despair," a time to take actions that generate "narratives of hope." I suggest exiting from Wells Fargo and its top investors: Berkshire, Vanguard, BlackRock, and Fidelity.

As for Mr. Stumpf, who left his position with a package of \$134 million, I commend to him the words of Pope Francis: "Once capital becomes an idol and guides people's decisions ... it destroys human fraternity [and] sets people against one another."

If Jesus is your Lord and Savior, don't let Wells Fargo hold your treasure. ■

*Rose Marie Berger, a Sojourners senior associate editor, is a Catholic peace activist and poet.*



Advent is a time to generate "narratives of hope."

addresses. "The frauds violate federal and state statutes against bank fraud and identity theft," William K. Black Jr., white-collar criminologist and cofounder of Bank Whistleblowers United, told *Sojourners*. Customers incurred charges and fines; in some cases, their credit ratings were damaged.

CEO Stumpf accepted "full responsibility for all unethical sales practices in our retail banking business." (John Steinbeck once called this kind of thing a successful combination of "piracy and puritanism.")





By Mitali Perkins

## Stories for All God's **Children**

Paying attention to race and power in children's books.

.....

**WHEN I ROAMED** the Flushing Public Library as an immigrant child, I encountered mirrors and windows—in *Little Women*, Jo loved her sisters as I did mine; in *A Little Princess*, Sara Crewe's heart for the disenfranchised stirred me to compassion; and in *Anne of Green Gables*, I found another child who loved to write.

It didn't strike me until later that I never encountered a hero who reflected my ethnicity or brown skin. If Indian culture showed up at all, it was portrayed negatively, as in *The Secret Garden*, where Indians were described as "natives" and "pigs." In another book, a lone Indian character was a mysterious servant without any back story. I still reread those two books regularly and know they were crucial in my formation. But I wonder if their portrayal of my ethnicity underlined the truth that my Indian-ness was a liability in wider culture. It took years for me to be grateful, instead of ashamed, about being Bengali. A good book or two with a Bengali protagonist might have helped.

Stories are powerful, and Jesus modeled storytelling that changes the hearer for good. But

Above, a page from *Whistle for Willie*, a story about perseverance by acclaimed artist/author Ezra Jack Keats, whose books for children celebrate both diversity and commonalities in the American experience.



depicted Japanese people as victims rather than perpetrators of violence. A publisher recalled a picture book after outcry over the inaccurate portrayal of a cheerful, compliant slave. When dialect used by black teens in a novel was criticized, the book's release was postponed after it garnered starred reviews. Librarians remove the *Little House* series from circulation because of the books' negative portrayal of Native Americans.

The controversial word "banning" pops up in the debate to describe everything from editors not acquiring a story, book-sellers and libraries not stocking it, teachers not assigning it, and parents not buying it

## How do we fight for freedom of expression as well as champion the marginalized child?

to publishers pulling it. Another option is to keep a flawed book in the pantheon but to "bowdlerize" offensive parts, like changing the "n-word" to "slave" in a new edition of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Imagine a black student hearing a white teacher utter the "n-word" 219 times, bowdlerizers argue. Others believe such a book is best introduced by adults who are equipped to teach critical thinking. Advocates of intellectual freedom defend access to even the most contentious book, arguing that if we provide more good books than bad ones, we protect children from the "danger of a single story"—a phrase coined by novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in a TED talk. Meanwhile, concerned by the power of stories to marginalize or foster hatred in the hearts of children, others defend the right to winnow the shelves.

When I read or write stories for children, I start by asking questions about race and power. Here are a few.

### 1. How does a storyteller identify race?

White default theorizes that when an author doesn't purposefully identify race, most Western readers will automatically envision characters as white. I used to be skeptical of this, given that my imagination's version of

Continued on Page 43

## New & Noteworthy



### REFUSING SILENCE

The documentary film *The Uncondemned* tells how a group of international lawyers and activists, all under 35 when they began, fought to get the first conviction of rape as a war crime—and how Rwandan women defied death threats to testify and win justice. [theuncondemned.com](http://theuncondemned.com)

### WELCOMING THE LIGHT

In *The Light of the World: Daily Meditations for Advent and Christmas*, Phyllis Zagano, writer and scholar of Catholic spirituality and women's leadership in the church, offers incisive reflections and prayers to help readers "become quieter, slower even, pointing to the Christ who is to come." Twenty-Third Publications

### POWER-POP PROPHETS

The Shondes, a queer, feminist pop-punk band from Brooklyn, weave activist fervor with progressive Jewish prophetic imagination and spirituality: "Hope can anchor any strategy," is a telling lyric. The melodious songs on their new album, *Brighton*, soar with violin and Louisa Rachel Solomon's clear, strong voice. Exotic Fever Records

### HOME IN A STRANGE LAND

*Words in Transit: Stories of Immigrants* is a book of oral histories from nearly 30 immigrants and refugees who have settled in western New England. Edited by Ilan Stavans, with photographs by Beth Reynolds, it presents snapshots of the courage and gifts that flow to our country. New England Public Radio

other stories can be propaganda that causes us to hate or fear the "other." Jesus raged at those who harm children by causing them to sin: "It would be better for you to have a large millstone tied around your neck."

When it comes to race and power in books for children, questions abound. Must I have experienced the same lack of privilege as my main character to tell her story? When is storytelling a form of cultural exchange and when does it disintegrate into cultural appropriation? Does the fear of making a "fatal flaw" hinder creativity? Who decides that a story should be kept from children because it might teach them to hate the "other" or even themselves? Does this kind of protection violate freedom of expression?

These are not esoteric questions. They result in action and confrontation. Korean parents protested a historical novel that



## Tech and Consequences

**TOWARD THE END** of August this year, more than 100 million potential U.S. voters were exposed to a fake story about the presidential election that was disguised as hard news. The story, which claimed that Fox News anchor Megyn Kelly had endorsed Hillary Clinton, began on an ultra-Right website called [endingthefed.com](http://endingthefed.com), but a link to it quickly appeared in the “Trending” box at the top of the Facebook screen. Not only did the fraudulent link slip through Facebook’s legendary screening software, but it stayed there for a full eight hours.

A couple of weeks later, the opposite problem struck when the Facebook robo-censor kicked out posts containing the Pulitzer Prize-winning 1972 photograph of a young naked Vietnamese girl fleeing a U.S. napalm attack. The Facebook Machine didn’t see a gut-wrenching statement about the cruelty of war. It only saw a naked little girl. After



appears on Facebook or other digital media intermediaries, including the Google News search engine. Are we just going to see the stories that are generating the most statistically measurable buzz? Or will trained professionals take a hand in guaranteeing that what we see is actually true? The answer has enormous legal consequences for companies such as Facebook. If their human staffs are making choices about the veracity and relative importance of news stories, then digital media platforms may be liable to lawsuits over the content of those stories. But the stakes are even higher for the future of journalism and the functioning of democracy.

This question first surfaced back in May when an anonymous employee in Facebook’s “Trending” team claimed that stories with a conservative spin were being systematically excluded. A statistical analysis found no evidence of such bias; still, three months later Facebook fired its human “Trending” team. From that day forward, the company proclaimed, “Trending” decisions would be made solely by the Machine.

A week later, the Megyn Kelly debacle occurred.

So what, you may be asking. We’re talking about Facebook. What does it matter which stories are mixed in next to

that endless stream of vacation pictures and random ads? Well, it matters. According to the Pew Research Center, 44 percent of adult Americans say they get news from Facebook. By providing the public with access to the news, and prioritizing some news stories and sources over others, Facebook is performing some of the historic functions of journalism. But the company is showing none of the commitment to truth and the public interest that are at the core of journalistic ethics.

Historically, the Federal Communications Commission has played a role in ensuring Americans’ access to diverse news sources and the accountability of news outlets to the public interest. It did this mostly through regulation of news media ownership. In the digital world, we often hear, our information choices are nearly infinite, so we don’t need media regulation anymore. And this is true if you want to spend your life hunting for your own information sources. But in practice, today most information comes to most people through a tiny handful of digital conduits. So it may be time for the

FCC to shine some light on the practices of those organizations. ■



**Danny Duncan Collum**, author of the novel *White Boy*, teaches writing at Kentucky State University in Frankfort.

**Are we just going to see the news that generates the most statistically measurable buzz?**

an entire day of protests, Facebook finally announced that it would reprogram the software to allow *that* photo of a naked girl.

Facebook has been cajoled and scolded over the past year by various German officials about the company’s failure to preemptively remove racist material, as German law requires. But Zuckerberg insists Facebook is “a tech company, not a media company.” We build “the tools,” he said, “we do not produce any content.”

The through line in all of these controversies is a persistent question about the role of human decisions versus that of computer algorithms in determining what material

Continued from Page 41

*The Lord of the Rings* resulted in a mad crush on a swarthy, dark-skinned Aragorn. Then Suzanne Collins' *Hunger Games* series was adapted for the screen. When a black actor was cast as Rue instead of a white one, some fans responded with anger. In the book, Rue has "satiny, dark skin," but these readers ignored Collins' deliberate race descriptors—not only were they white defaulting, they were white *overriding*. Savvy authors, therefore, must think carefully about how to describe race. It's complicated. Contemporary race labels might sound racist in the future. If we include "black" to describe one character, as J.K. Rowling did in the *Harry Potter* series, unidentified characters default to white. Maybe we use a name, outfit, or food choice to hint at ethnicity. Or perhaps, like Collins, we include physical descriptors. What we authors can't do is not think about it. Meanwhile, readers should notice whether and how race is defined.

Cover art can settle the question of a protagonist's race. Pay attention—does the cover reveal the race of the hero? Is it true to the story? When the hero isn't white, race is sometimes camouflaged to sell books: Narrow a nose or make lips thinner in the silhouette of her boyfriend so the book doesn't scream interracial romance. Put a light-skinned girl on the cover of a dark girl's story. Hide Asian eyes and show only pale hands clutching a dagger. I'm not inventing these marketing decisions—all have occurred recently in the young-adult book world.

## 2. Has the author used tropes instead of creating authentic characters?

When I write a novel, I try to imagine which languages each of my character's grandparents or great-grandparents spoke. I like to know whether the characters know those languages or care that they don't know. I don't actually have to put any of that into my story, but without reflection like this, it's tempting to default to tropes. In the old days, storytellers got away with lazy crows voiced by black actors in Disney's animated film *Dumbo* or a mute Tonto serving the Lone Ranger. Today it's more common to encounter stereotypes written into a story by an author's subconscious. Notice a nonwhite "magical negro," mammy, or mystical elder who advises a white protagonist. There may

From *We're the Superhumans*



## GETTING READY TO BE **HEROES**

**THREE RECENT FILMS** portray heroism as ordinary people behaving with conviction under extraordinary circumstances. In *Sully*, an airline pilot lands safely in the Hudson River; in *Snowden*, a man speaks truth to power when he realizes it has been lying to him; and in the three-minute short *We're the Superhumans*, British Paralympians and others with disabilities dance, jump, run, and fly to a big-band soundtrack. They are changing the world by challenging dominant cultural images of "able bodies," "normal," and "strong."

Musician and activist David LaMotte has a theory about effective activism: An individual hero single-handedly overturning monstrous injustice isn't a harmless cliché trotted out in TV or film dramatizations. Projecting near-supernatural power on such people is not only inaccurate, it denies them an even greater power: to truly influence others. If Rosa Parks or Martin Luther King Jr. were merely magicians, how can any of us respond other than applaud their tricks and despair of our capacity to challenge the oppression we discern in our own times? In *World-Changing 101* (a book whose title is both serious and ironic), LaMotte suggests that this harmful fantasy ignores the strategic preparation and community support that nurture effective activism. Montgomery bus boycott handbills were printed by a

group led by a teacher, Jo Ann Robinson; she had worked for years as a civil rights activist, including preparing for such a boycott. Printing handbills, sharing cars, telling hopeful stories, serving lemonade to tired marchers—all were vital parts of the body of change. Rosa Parks sat down alone, but she got up with many.

The cinematic heroes who don't look like real-life activists avoid community, tending to act alone (Batman at least has a butler). Instead of painstaking planning (trial and error too), they spring into action or reaction when the bad guy is already halfway to victory (the villain often confidently explaining his dastardly plan just before it is foiled). They're typically not around for the work of integrating the aftermath.

But *Sully* sees heroism as doing what you are trained to do—repudiating the notion that an emergency landing is a "miracle" rather than an act of human skill. *Snowden* tells how a whistleblower enlisted distinguished journalists so his revelations could be ethically told. And in the most glorious image of the year, *We're the Superhumans* parallels one man in a flying wheelchair with another cleaning his teeth. Just getting out of bed can be heroic. ■

*Gareth Higgins is an Irish writer and founder of [moviesandmeaning.com](http://moviesandmeaning.com) and [www.irelandretreats.com](http://www.irelandretreats.com).*



be a model minority sidekick who serves as a foil for a flawed hero, or an “exotic other” love interest. Check for back story; tropes usually aren’t given much. This may be because the story doesn’t have space, but often it’s because authors don’t take time to imagine authentic secondary characters.

### 3. How does the author acknowledge a history of oppression, if at all?

Storytelling can teach atrocities in history or erase and minimize them. Authors who seek to write such a story must reflect on our privilege. Should I tell the story or could another writer better inform it with authenticity of experience? Fear of outcry isn’t a good reason to stop writing, but as we take time to research painful history, imagine child readers, and empower other authors, we might decide to stop or keep writing. The finished book might not contain direct references to an “R-rated” historical reality, but our subtext and the way we shaped our story will reflect whether or not we grappled with the realities of history and sought to understand our privilege. Astute readers will notice.

The overarching purpose of the debate is how to nourish children with good stories. First, we *pay attention* to portrayals of race. Second, we *consume* and *share* many well-told stories to counter the danger of a single story. Third, we *decide* in community whether and how to protect children from a story that causes them to hate others and themselves.

I’m never sure about that third step. As a story creator, I stand with the First Amendment and fiercely defend our right to learn from mistakes. But as a servant of the “least of these,” in a country where the 13th Amendment (abolishing slavery) was necessary, I understand the power of stories to damage and to bless. What I do know with certainty is that this third step is best taken in concert with the first. How do we fight for freedom of expression as well as champion the marginalized child? As always, we start with prayerful attention. ■

**Mitali Perkins** ([mitaliperkins.com](http://mitaliperkins.com)) has written 10 novels for young readers, including *Bamboo People*, *Tiger Boy*, and *Rickshaw Girl*. Her newest is *You Have Made the Distant Near*, releasing fall 2017 from Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux Books for Younger Readers.

## BEYOND THE ‘SINGLE STORY’

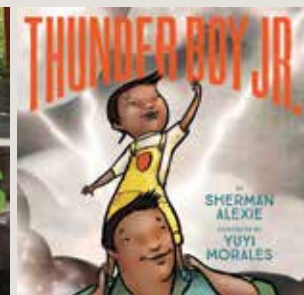
Books as diverse as the kids who read them.

**TO FIND BOOKS** for young people by and about people from a variety of perspectives—including race, sexual orientation, gender, religion, class, and disability—the children’s librarian at your school or the public library will often be the place to start. If you’re fortunate enough to have an independent bookstore in your area with a robust children’s department, the staff there may also be of help.

If in-person advice is in short supply where you live, several online sites can also provide ideas. These include the website of the Cooperative Children’s Book Center at the University of Wisconsin-Madison ([ccbc.education.wisc.edu/books](http://ccbc.education.wisc.edu/books)), which has bibliographies and booklists on a wide range of topics and population groups. The We Need Diverse Books campaign website ([weneeddiversebooks.org](http://weneeddiversebooks.org)) has a variety of resources for finding diverse books for young people, including a list of other websites that focus on books featuring certain demographics or on diversity in specific genres. ThePirateTree.com features interviews, reviews, and other articles from a collective of children’s and young adult book writers interested in children’s literature and social justice issues. School Library Journal ([slj.com](http://slj.com)) is a key source of reviews and other publishing information for librarians and teachers who work with children and teens.

The following are examples of recent books that break free of the restraints of a “single story.”

**Families**, by Shelley Rotner and Sheila M. Kelly, is a picture book for very young children that describes and celebrates all different configurations of families. Holiday House (Ages 2 to 6)

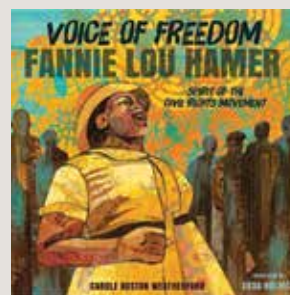


**Thunder Boy Jr.** is the first picture book by beloved young-adult fiction author Sherman Alexie. Illustrated by Mexican-American artist Yuyi Morales, it is the exuberant story of a little boy who is nicknamed after his father but wishes instead for a name “that celebrates something cool that I’ve done.” Little, Brown Books for Young Readers (Ages 4 to 7)

In **Lailah’s Lunchbox: A Ramadan Story**, by Reem Faruqi, with illustrations by Lea Lyon, young Lailah is excited to be old enough to fast during Ramadan but is reluctant to tell other children why she is skipping lunch. An understanding teacher helps Lailah find a solution. Tilbury House Publishers (Ages 5 to 8)

**The Land of Forgotten Girls**, by Erin Entrada Kelly, is a story about two sisters from the Philippines, Soledad and Ming, abandoned by their father and living with an abusive stepmother in Louisiana. A realistic but ultimately hopeful story of imagination and resilience. Greenwillow Books (Ages 8 to 12)

**Voice of Freedom: Fannie Lou Hamer, Spirit of the Civil Rights Movement**, by Carole Boston Weatherford, with collage illustrations by Ekua Holmes,



Reviewed by Liane Rozzell

## MAKING SURE BLACK GIRLS MATTER

*Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools*, by Monique W. Morris.  
The New Press.

**WE HAVE SEEN** some of their stories on the news and social media: Black girls, some as young as 5 and 6 years old, criminalized and harshly punished in school settings. For example, Desre'e Watson, a Florida child, and Salecia Johnson in Georgia, both 6-year-old kindergarten students, both handcuffed and arrested by police for having emotional meltdowns—temper tantrums—at school. Or last year, the South Carolina teen flipped over in her desk and thrown across the room by a sheriff's deputy for refusing to put away her cell phone or leave her algebra class, and, incredibly, Niya Kenny, the distraught classmate who recorded the incident on her phone and was arrested as well (though charges were later dropped).

When these and other outrageous examples of harsh punishment of school children come to public attention, they are seen as part of the school-to-prison pipeline that disproportionately pushes youth of color—especially African-American youth—out of school and toward the justice system. These problems often are seen as primarily affecting males, and initiatives to address them focus on improving outcomes for black boys. In her book *Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools*, Monique Morris makes the case that the specific experiences and treatment of black girls in schools and society are different from those of black boys and merit systematic attention and remedies tailored to create opportunities for black girls to thrive.

*Pushout* examines the intersection of black girls' experiences as both girls and black youth. The book spotlights the persistent “one-dimensional stereotypes, images, and debilitating narratives” that threaten black girls' survival and lead them to what Morris terms “school-to-confinement pathways.” Morris, president and cofounder of the National Black Women's Justice Institute, stresses that she is not attempting to pit oppressed identities—black males and black females—against each other. Instead, she systematically unpacks the particulars of black girls' experiences to explain why “individuals, communities, and all sorts of institutions have an obligation to understand why the pushout of black girls ... goes unchallenged.”

What is “pushout?” Morris defines it as “the collection of policies, practices, and consciousness that fosters [black girls'] invisibility, marginalizes their pain and opportunities, and facilitates their criminalization.” To analyze pushout's impact on black girls' ability to get a good education, Morris quotes from extensive interviews with black girls in a variety of settings,

including alternative schools and juvenile justice facilities. Through this deep listening, she brings us face to face with girls who are too often unheard and discarded. In addition to the interviews, Morris provides statistics and historical and cultural context to create a more complete picture of the problems black girls face.

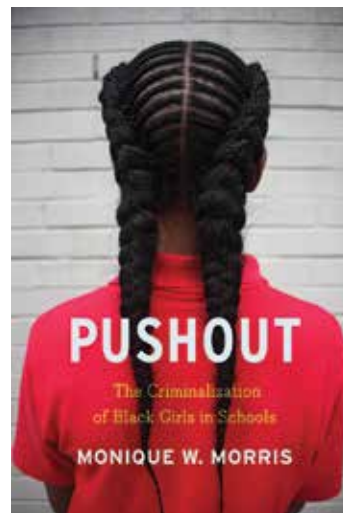
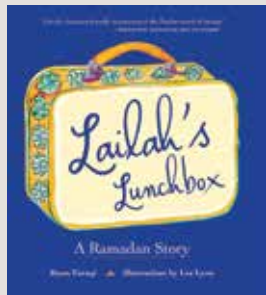
Stereotypes and assumptions about black femininity disadvantage black girls

channels the voice of grassroots civil rights activist Hamer through poetic verse. Candlewick (Ages 10 and up)

In the novel **The Last Cherry Blossom**, by Kathleen Burkinshaw, Yuriko Ishikawa lives in Hiroshima with her father, aunt, and cousin during the turmoil of World War II. Both the details of Japanese life in that era and the devastation caused by the atomic bomb are inspired by the author's mother's experiences growing up in Hiroshima. Sky Pony Press (Ages 11 to 13)

**The Sun Is Also a Star**, by Nicola Yoon, is set in New York City and tells a bittersweet love story between Natasha, a Jamaican girl under threat of deportation, and Daniel, the pressured-to-achieve son of immigrants from Korea. Delacorte (Ages 12 and up)

Due out in February 2017, **The Hate U Give** is the debut novel by Angie Thomas. The protagonist, 16-year-old Starr Carter, navigates between her city neighborhood and the suburban prep school she attends. Her life is upended when she is the sole witness to a police shooting of her best friend, Khalil. Balzer + Bray/HarperCollins (Ages 12 and up) —Julie Polter



**Stereotypes and assumptions about black femininity disadvantage black girls and hold them back in school settings.**



and hold them back in school settings. *Pushout* scrutinizes the polarizing “good” vs. “ghetto” dichotomy that stigmatizes and punishes black girls as defiant and insubordinate when they stray outside society’s narrow confines of acceptable, “ladylike” behavior. Here, Morris quotes heartbreaking stories from girls who were punished for asking questions in class, wearing clothing deemed “inappropriate,” or defending themselves against harassment and bullying.

Morris also examines trauma and experiences such as sex trafficking, which disproportionately impact black girls in under-resourced communities. She urges school and justice officials to take their victimization seriously and provide healing and trauma-informed responses. She also sheds light on the woefully inadequate edu-

**“We’re in this struggle against racial oppression and patriarchy together.”**

cation available to girls in many juvenile justice facilities.

The book is not merely a depressing recitation of what’s wrong. *Pushout* includes extensive recommendations and resources for girls, their families and communities, and educators. These solutions, rooted in black girls’ experiences and sound practices, could foster culturally competent and affirming schools and relationships that support black girls in their quest for education and wellbeing.

*Pushout* is a valuable, compelling, and necessary addition to our understanding of the obstacles black girls face in school and society. As Morris notes, “This book is written with love. We’re in this struggle against racial oppression and patriarchy together, and unless we examine everyone’s experiences, we lose the ability to support our girls and young women” as they seek to survive and thrive. ■

*Liane Rozzell is a senior policy associate for juvenile justice at the Annie E. Casey Foundation, which develops solutions to build a brighter future for children, families, and communities.*

Reviewed by Anne Colamosca

## FROM ‘GROCER’ TO RESCUER

***Raoul Wallenberg: The Heroic Life and Mysterious Disappearance of the Man Who Saved Thousands of Hungarian Jews from the Holocaust*, by Ingrid Carlberg. MacLehose Press.**

**IN THE EARLY 1940s**, Raoul Wallenberg was a slight, balding young man living modestly in Stockholm. He worked for a trading company that imported Hungarian poultry to Sweden. Wallenberg’s colleagues were mainly Hungarian Jews.

He had trained in the U.S. to be an architect. But on his return to Sweden, Wallenberg discovered that he didn’t have the engineering courses required to be hired in his homeland. His other career alternative, banking, also eluded him. The extended Wallenberg family owned one of Sweden’s most prosperous banks, Stockholms Enskilda Bank. But they found Wallenberg to be overly talkative, too artistically inclined, and having a penchant for drama that did not signal, for them, the makings of a top-drawer Swedish banker. So Wallenberg fell into depression, feeling that he was a failure, now known to his family disparagingly as “the grocer.”

Yet this unfulfilled young man would become, virtually overnight, one of the great heroes of World War II.

Veteran Swedish journalist Ingrid Carlberg has written a remarkable, nuanced, 600-page biography featuring extensive original research and new material: *Raoul Wallenberg: The Heroic Life and Mysterious Disappearance of the Man Who Saved Thousands of Hungarian Jews from the Holocaust*. The English translation of this award-winning work was released earlier this year.

When the Germans sent 500 Norwegians to Auschwitz in late 1942, the outraged Swedish government, which had remained neutral, declared that Sweden would accept any Jew who could make it to the Swedish border. They also decided to set up a special humanitarian aid mission in Budapest to help Hungarian Jews being annihilated by Hitler’s troops. A colleague at the

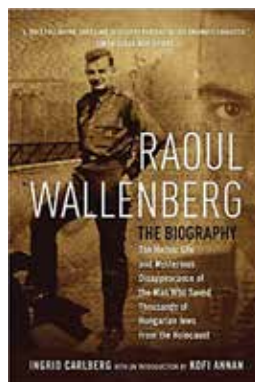
trading company immediately recommended Wallenberg to the Swedish Foreign Mission to head the new mission.

Wallenberg spoke both German and Hungarian, and he quickly put together an eclectic network of Hungarians to help him. Although it was practically unknown to hire someone with no diplomatic experience for such a key mission, the Foreign Ministry entrusted him with nearly \$5 million. With the money, Wallenberg personally designed and issued thousands of authentic-looking Swedish protective passports to Hungarian Jews. His staff set up an entire hospital in downtown Budapest. A complex food distribution system was developed to feed thousands, along with a large number of Swedish safe houses for refugees on the run.

A Budapest colleague described Wallenberg as a warm person who was “courageous, he had imagination and always found solutions.” But he also could transform himself into a steely negotiator, the colleague said, and “when he spoke with the Germans he used their language ... and screamed at them.”

Wallenberg appeared at the Budapest train station one morning as thousands were being forced into boxcars destined for concentration camps. “I have your name,” he’d say in a stiff, official tone to a deportee. “Where is your document?” The deportees would show him whatever crumpled piece of paper they had. “Excellent,” said Wallenberg. “Next.” Nazi guards watched respectfully as Wallenberg marched off with 500 people.

On another day, Wallenberg showed up at a Budapest synagogue. Again, he called out many names, mimicking the surrounding Nazi soldiers with his bearing and shrill language. In all, Carlberg estimates that Wallenberg’s mission saved about 100,000



Hungarian Jews, mainly in the year 1944.

But in January 1945, Wallenberg's luck ran out. Soviet soldiers forced their way into his building, and at his own request, he was taken to the Soviet general in charge. He was detained by the Soviets on suspicion of espionage.

He was never seen again by family or friends, and is believed to have been killed in Soviet custody in 1947. In one brief year Wallenberg became a genius of invention, able to use his many talents in a spectacular, iconoclastic way before he disappeared forever at the age of 32. ■

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*Anne Colamosca is a former staff writer at Business Week and has written for many national magazines and newspapers.*

*Reviewed by Rich Villodas*

## OF TWO MINDS

*The Mestizo Augustine: A Theologian Between Two Cultures*, by Justo L. González. IVP Academic.

**"YOU HAVE MADE** us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you."

These oft-quoted words, delivered from pulpits, books, and classrooms through the centuries, came from the theological giant St. Augustine. Augustine is widely noted as one of the most important theologians in Western Christianity. His acclaimed works, most notably *Confessions* and *City of God*, have shaped the thinking and spirituality of pastors, scholars, and regular church-going folk.

However, even with all the pages written about Augustine, there's been a missing element that hasn't been significantly excavated, namely, Augustine's mestizo makeup. This is why historical theology scholar Justo González's new book, *The Mestizo Augustine: A Theologian Between Two Cultures*, is a welcome and much-needed contribution to Augustinian theology.

The central thrust of *The Mestizo Augustine* is the exploration of the "mestizo" nature of Augustine and his theological journey. The word "mestizo" (which flows out of Latino/a theology) is a Spanish word that captures what it means to be of mixed heritage. Being mestizo is a recognition of



St. Augustine, by Italian Renaissance artist Vittor Carpaccio.

hybridity or, as González notes, "to belong to two realities and at the same time not to belong to either of them." This mestizaje lens is needed to better understand Augustine.

González unpacks the African/Roman hybridity of Augustine. This hybridity manifested in language, philosophical frameworks, and traditions. For example, being mestizo, Augustine lived in two worlds as it pertained to understanding the concept and practice of authority. González notes that in African culture, authority rested in the holiness, wisdom, and charisma of a leader. In Roman culture, authority did not rest on individual character but "in the

cultures and civilizations have arisen out of various forms of mestizaje—the Greco-Roman mestizaje, the Latin-Germanic mestizaje, the Saxon-Norman mestizaje, the Iberian-Amerindian." Historically, to be mestizaje has been seen pejoratively, as somehow contaminating the notion of purity. However, González helps us to see the inherent beauty and ubiquitous nature of hybrid culture.

Third, *The Mestizo Augustine* reminds us that theology needs to be seen in the light of space and time, not through a gnostic acultural and ahistorical lens. It's ironic that many approach the great theologians

## González helps us to see the inherent beauty and ubiquitous nature of hybrid culture.

function to which that person had been assigned." Being mestizo meant Augustine needed to wrestle with the implications of these two worlds.

As a U.S. Latino (of Puerto Rican descent, born in New York), I found myself deeply identifying with Augustine's narrative and *Sitz im Leben* (his social context). While he lived in two cultures, he favored the language of one (Latin), while remaining loyal to his Northern African heritage. With my limited Spanish, I regularly experience an "in-between-ness" similar to Augustine's.

This bicultural portrayal of a theological giant is necessary for a few reasons. First, it serves as an accessible primer for anyone looking to explore the core focus areas of Augustinian theology.

Second, González importantly normalizes the mestizo nature of history. He notes, "whether we realize it or not, all

of history without a careful consideration of context. In light of Augustine's rejection of Manicheism, it makes sense that readers should consider the concrete reality that shaped his thinking and practice. In this respect, González helps us see that theology is always geographical and biographical. The local narrative perspective that Augustine presents is a gift. His North African/Roman context doesn't limit the impact of his theology, especially when one recognizes that all theology flows from a particular locale.

Due to the richness of González's articulation of history, I was hungry to hear more of the bicultural implications of Augustine's theology. *The Mestizo Augustine* provides much-needed nuance to understanding one of the church's most influential figures. ■

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## Called to Wait

**WE'RE ENTERING** “the most wonderful time of the year,” as the song goes. Christmas gifts are piling up. The retail stores are busy as ever. Folks are anticipating the coming weeks with lots of food and time with family. For others, excitement is *not* what they feel at Christmas. Instead Christmas conjures memories of loss and neglect. For many, it's a time of pain and suffering. How is the Christian to navigate this range of experiences? We practice Advent. The church invites us to live as though Christmas can wait. We hold off on all the celebration and consumption. We learn what it means to *wait for God*.

The pressure is pervasive to turn Christmas into being busy and buying stuff. Anxiety is high. Resentment's in the air. Waiting, especially the Christian practice of waiting, is furthest from our minds and habits. Yet Jesus calls us to wait, to interrupt the world's addiction during this season so that we can be surprised by Christ coming anew, in unanticipated ways. Because God is hidden. God has hidden God's self in the most unlikely of places, in a Jewish baby named Jesus. But this is no meek and mild infant. Leave sweet baby Jesus for Ricky Bobby in *Talladega Nights*. The baby born to Mary is the coming Messiah who confronts the world's violence with the way of peace. God in Jesus continues to hide in unlikely places. We learn how to wait, and pay attention, to where God will show up, to wait for the peaceable world God is birthing in our midst.



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[ DECEMBER 4 ]

## Fire of Love

Isaiah 11:1-10; Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19; Romans 15:4-13; Matthew 3:1-12

**ISAIAH IS SPEAKING** to a people that *will be* redeemed. Exile is their present reality. The movement from exile to redemption is part of the flow of Israel's story. How does Israel maintain sanity with such ebbs and flows of their freedom? Patience. Yet something is amiss if what scripture means by patience is the microwave sensibilities of this age. It's crucial that all four gospels begin Jesus' story with John the Baptist's message of repentance. We should not sentimentalize the baby Jesus. The Advent message requires that we be attentive to Jesus, the coming judge. Repentance is fundamental to Advent.

For John, repentance is tied to place: the wilderness. John is pushed into the wilderness because he is a threat to the status quo. He is a fugitive; he experiences lack; he is an outcast; he suffers. John is the embodiment of Israel's repentance, the picture of what it means to be God's holy people. Wilderness is the place where Israel is both punished and formed, the place of disobedience and faith, of pain and gift. From the wilderness, the prophets promise exodus.

What does it look like for us to wait for Jesus' coming, to practice Advent? Slow down. Be attentive to pain and suffering, to the wilderness. Repentance is not about teary faces and altar calls. It's about interrupting the world's tendency to silence suffering. This will bring persecution from those who benefit from the suffering of others. We need not worry about the fruit of our repentant life, though. John exposes that any fruit we claim as an exercise in securing status is not the fruit of God. God has the power and freedom to raise up from stones fruit to bear God's name. This power is made manifest in Jesus and his baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire. All that is not right about our lives, the fruit we bear that is inconsistent with repentance, will be put into the Spirit's refining fire, a fire of love whose intensity is so strong that neither we, nor the world, can stay the same.

*“Preaching the Word,” Sojourners’ online resource for sermon preparation and Bible study, is available at [sojo.net/ptw](http://sojo.net/ptw).*

[ DECEMBER 11 ]

## Manna or Macy's?

Isaiah 35:1-10; Psalm 146:5-10; James 5:7-10; Matthew 11:2-11

**JOHN THE BAPTIST** is a polarizing figure. He lives in the woods, eats from the land, and dresses like a beggar. No doubt he was smelly and ungroomed. Who'd want to travel to hear such a man? Sounds like a fire-and-brimstone street preacher. Everyone avoids them. Not the Baptist. Jesus calls him “more than a prophet,” one of the greatest to walk the earth. Jesus definitely redefines greatness. John is a vagabond preacher in the wilderness. He is beheaded. He's not unlike the king of which he preaches, Jesus, who is murdered by the Roman kingdom's death penalty. Because Jesus' kingdom does not operate by wealth and power, John must be the forerunner. There is no room for sentimentality in the life and ministries of these men. Neither should there be for us.

Stanley Hauerwas has said that “the true enemy of Christianity is not atheism, but sentimentality.” The Christmas season reeks of sentimentality. The way that U.S. Christians prepare the way for Jesus each year is with consumption and greed, with bells and whistles and shiny things. Is this what it looks like to wait for Jesus' coming (Matthew 11:7b)? Maybe for Santa, but not Jesus. James says that the way Christians wait for the *parousia* should be characterized by suffering, a patient suffering modeled by the prophets (James 5:10). Only a patient suffering makes the signs of Jesus' coming kingdom recognizable: “The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor” (Matthew 11:5). A heart and mind formed by the market doesn't recognize these signs as good news. Pity, maybe? But not good news for the salvation of the world. This Christmas season, Christians would do well to be more oriented to the wilderness than to downtown. Just maybe we'll recognize and point people to the way of Jesus, and not Macy's (Isaiah 35:8).

[ DECEMBER 18 ]

## Choosing to Stay

Isaiah 7:10-16; Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19;  
Romans 1:1-7; Matthew 1:18-25

**MATTHEW'S GOSPEL** gives us the best look at Joseph in the story of Jesus' birth. Before Joseph and Mary get married, Joseph discovers that Mary is pregnant. At this point in the story no one knows that Mary's pregnancy was by the Spirit of God. The town would have seen Mary and Joseph as unholy, disobedient, and driven by passion. Joseph is surely aware of this. He knows that he has not slept with Mary. She must have cheated on him, right? Custom required Joseph to publicly divorce Mary for cheating. To expose to the community her "wickedness." For Joseph, to *not* divorce her was to invite the harshest insults and embarrassment upon himself—and on Mary. To publicly divorce Mary would have meant Joseph's reputation could have been almost wiped clean.

[ DECEMBER 25 ]

## Prince of Peace

Isaiah 9:2-7; Psalm 96; Titus 2:11-14;  
Luke 2:1-14, 15-20

**THE DANGER OF** the conflation of Christianity and empire is the co-opting of story. The narrative of Jesus' birth has become a story of accommodation. We've settled for the intellectualizing of the virgin birth, the reductionism of excavating the fulfillment of prophecy, and the sentimentality of re-creating the scene for Christmas plays. We have missed one of the most important lines of Luke's telling of the story: "And she gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn" (Luke 2:7).

Jesus is a baby, born in a trough for animals, outside of the space of comfort as an oppressed Jew from the inconsequential town of Nazareth. The Incarnate One, the Messiah, the Lord emerges from marginal-

## God in Jesus continues to hide in unlikely places.

He would have even walked away with some money. Who wouldn't have stuck to law and order? Preserve your reputation, financial status, and the status quo. This is the way of revenge!

Yet, Joseph is declared righteous because he was "unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, [and] planned to dismiss her quietly" (Matthew 1:19). Joseph seeks to save Mary from public punishment, shame, and humiliation, and thus preserve for her a future to be able to marry again and have a family. If Joseph is to be made the father of Jesus, Joseph must be a fitting reflection of the character of God. The virgin birth reveals that God *refuses to abandon us*. Joseph's quiet divorce is his refusal to abandon Mary and Jesus to be torn to pieces by society. To refuse to abandon is to show mercy. Through the story of this young, poor family, from an oppressed community, comes the embodiment of mercy. The affirmation that God will restore us, shine God's face upon us, and save the world (Psalm 80:7, 19).

ity, as the dispossessed, without the world's structure of power. No wonder everyone is "amazed." It is Mary's posture, her discipleship, that we must follow. To receive the poor, disinherited Messiah is to find treasure, but not silver and gold, or the plunder from "finding" land not your own.

This is the treasure of liberation delivered by the Messiah whose reign is characterized by justice, equity, and peace. Which means that those who operate in this world by war will never recognize the Messiah, now or in the time to come. Their way of life is controlled by the passions and powers of this world. Their rods of oppression and boots of combat "shall be burned as fuel for the fire" (Isaiah 9:5). Those who treasure the Messiah live lives of self-control and uprightness. Lives demonstrating zeal for the good deeds of breaking the bondage of those who are oppressed. It is in the liberation of those once imprisoned by this world that the Messiah reclaims us as his own treasure! ■



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## A Brush with the Almighty

**THE BRILLIANT** white lights could mean only one thing. Okay, two things. Either I was in heaven, in the place where people wait nervously for their performance review with God, or I was in the recovery room after one of those Elderly Man Procedures and the nurses were keeping their humorous thoughts to themselves, something that would have been impossible for me had our positions been reversed. (“Hang on, I’ve got another one. What’s the difference between a colonoscopy and a ... shh ... he’s waking up! DARN IT!”)

The tanks of oxygen around the room were another indication that this wasn’t heaven, although at that altitude they might come in handy. (Do you breathe when you get to heaven? I know you have to *stop* breathing to even be considered.)

I hesitate to recount another medical procedure to readers who have grown weary of the chronicles of my continuing decay. But I bring

No, not Morgan Freeman. The other one, you know, in heaven.

this up mainly for eschatological reasons. (Coincidentally, one gets a colonoscopy for scatological reasons. But I digress.)

At my age, if you’re undergoing any procedure that involves general anesthesia, you must be prepared for the possibility of not waking up. You need to have your affairs in order—such as writing down your passwords for surviving loved ones, skipping ahead to the last episode of the TV show you’ve been streaming at the office, and gassing up the car one last time (surviving loved ones should really learn to do that for themselves)—and make your peace with God.

And what better time to meet the Lord than when both society and technology are telling me I should



step aside. This year’s election left me emotionally exhausted, I failed again to receive the MacArthur genius grant (how many more letters does my mom have to write?!), and I’m aging out of some features on my cellphone. I only use Facetime by mistake, inadvertently triggering the hideous apparition of some sickly relative of advanced years. And I’m afraid to open Yelp! because it sounds like it could hurt me.

My humor has also become woe-fully outdated. When Texas passed open-carry gun laws for college campuses I felt the moment cried out for a Mae West reference: “Is that a pistol in your pocket ... oh, it *is* a pistol in your pocket?” Hahaha! But today’s young people have never heard of Mae West, and can only guess she must be Kim Kardashian’s cousin by marriage.

Jesus himself would have a hard time these days, since turning water into wine wouldn’t impress a bunch of millennials more partial to craft beer. (Actually, it didn’t work out that well the first time, as the gospel of John recounts: “Thanks for making the extra red wine, Lord, but we’re having *fish*!”)

ACCEPTING MY extraneousness to the modern world, I prepared to meet my Maker and say goodbye to family and all my earthly possessions. Because, as they say, you can’t take it with you. Although it turns out it’s because there’s no more storage space in heaven. There used to

be, in the old days when the disciples started arriving. They had lived according to that lesser-known 11th commandment—“Thou shalt reduce, reuse, and recycle”—and showed up with just the shoes on their feet. (Some had dust on the soles, some did not, which raised questions about their timesheets.)

But second-century Christians were reluctant to leave behind the conveniences of modern life and started arriving with more and more possessions. So now there’s no room left, which is too bad. I really wanted to bring my new toaster oven.

I FIGURED THIS would be a good time to get to heaven, since Mother Teresa’s recent canonization meant there might be decorations and snacks left over from the party. She would have displayed her legendary humility, of course, maybe said a few words, then left, breathing a sigh of relief that people still don’t know about her secret Netflix account or that case of Diet Coke she kept under her modest bed.

Of course, I can’t compete with Mother Teresa when I reach those Pearly Gates—hers was a life of service, mine was spent trying to get good service, mainly on my cellphone. But I’m counting on my good credit score to get me through. (I’m bringing a note from my mortgage company.) ■

*Ed Spivey Jr. is art director of Sojourners.*

Ken Davis

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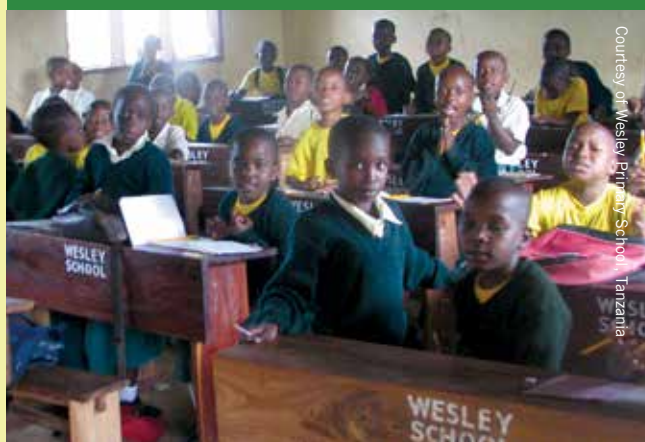
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